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BRITISH LITERATURE II

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INTRODUCTION

NOTES

Literature as a term is used for describing whatever is written or spoken. It basically comprises creative writing, innovative style and imagination. Literature has various forms; some popular ones are fiction, drama, prose and poetry. The 19th century witnessed the growth of all forms of literature. The Romantic Movement gained prominence in the early nineteenth century and there was a focus on celebration of nature and the common man. The publication of *Lyrical Ballads* heralded a new era in poetry as poets celebrated imagination and subjectivity. The ascendance of Queen Victoria on the British throne and the publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of the Species of Man,* however, led to a period of scepticism. This scepticism was best depicted in the works of Victorian writers like Tennyson and Arnold.

Other literary forms such as the prose and novels also developed greatly during the nineteenth century. While Charles Lamb was known for his *Essays of Elia,* Charles Dickens became popular in the latter half of the nineteenth century for his novels on social and political issues. Jane Austen's novels seamlessly blended the romance and realism of the Victorian Age. In the book, *British Literature II*, we have particularly dealt with the works of Wordsworth, Keats, Coleridge, Lamb and Jane Austen to provide a diverse range of prose, poetry and novel to the students.

This book, *British Literature II*, is divided into fourteen units that follow the self-instruction mode with each unit beginning with an Introduction to the unit, followed by an outline of the Objectives. The detailed content is then presented in a simple but structured manner interspersed with Check Your Progress Questions to test the student's understanding of the topic. A Summary along with a list of Key Words and a set of Self Assessment Questions and Exercises is also provided at the end of each unit for recapitulation.

BLOCK - I
POETRY - I

NOTES

UNIT 1 WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

William Wordsworth, one of the pioneers of the concept of English Romanticism, is known widely for his poems which espouse his love for nature and compassion towards the common man. Apart from setting a new attitude towards nature, Wordsworth considered poetry to be at the centre of the human experience. He believed that poetry should use the vocabulary and speech patterns of common people. According to Wordsworth, there is a spiritual connection between man and nature which is of utmost importance.

Wordsworth's poem *Tintern Abbey*, first published in 1798, also reveals Wordsworth's philosophy of nature. The poem *Lines Written (or Composed) a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour, July 13, 1798*, is often abbreviated to *Tintern Abbey*. In this poem, Wordsworth describes his second visit to River Wye and his tranquil experiences on witnessing the beauteous forms of nature. One of the most critically acclaimed works of Wordsworth, *Tintern Abbey* divulges the interconnectedness of man and nature. In this unit, we will be examining various issues related to the poem.

1.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Describe William Wordsworth's theory of poetry
- Understand the English Romantic Movement
- Analyse critically Wordsworth's poem *Tintern Abbey*

1.2 WILLIAM WORDSWORTH: *TINTERN ABBEY*

NOTES

William Wordsworth (1770-1850) changed the course of English poetry. While he was not the first nature poet, his treatment of the theme of nature made his contribution to English literature unique. Unlike his predecessors such as John Dyer (1700-1758), James Thomson (1700-1748) and Thomas Gray (1716-1771) who described nature in a conventional manner, Wordsworth had as his theme the internal world of man, strivings of the mind and the sublime experience of the soul.

Wordsworth began his literary career with *Descriptive Sketches* which was published in 1793. He was deeply influenced by the French Revolution and much of his poetical fervour is infused with the ideals that formed the French Revolution. His poetic inspiration found its ideal expression in the *Lyrical Ballads.* It would not be an exaggeration to state that Wordsworth, along with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, initiated the English Romantic Movement. The publication of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798 started the Romantic Movement, with its primary emphasis on the theme of nature. While poets were writing about ancient heroes, Wordsworth advocated that poets should write about nature, children, the poor and the common people. He advocated the use of simple words to express personal feelings. He defined poetry as 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings arising from emotion recollected in tranquillity'. As he writes in the *Lyrical Ballads*, 'Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge; it is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all Science' (from *Lyrical Ballads*, 2nd ed., 1800).

Wordsworth's aim, as Coleridge states in *Biographia Literaria*, was 'to give the charm of novelty to things of everyday, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's attention … and directing it to the loveliness and wonders of the world before us.' The *Lyrical Ballads,* to quote the critic Albert, 'is epoch-making, for it is prelude to the Romantic Movement proper'. A few poems such as *Simon Lee*, and *Expostulation and Reply* are remarkable, while *Tintern Abbey* is without any doubt the masterpiece of the *Lyrical Ballads*, or as Albert puts it, 'one of the triumphs of his genius'.

It is in the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* that Wordsworth elaborated upon his theory of poetry. He regards poetry as the finest of all aesthetic expressions; for him, poetry is the 'breath and finer spirit of all knowledge' whereas, the poet for Wordsworth is a man 'possessed of more than organic sensibility'. Wordsworth has also discussed at length what he perceives as an appropriate subject and style of poetry. To quote Wordsworth, the ideal themes were drawn from 'incidents and situations from common life', that is 'humble and rustic life was generally chosen because in that condition the essential passion of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain maturity'. Over such themes, it was Wordsworth's intention to throw 'a certain colouring of imagination whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect'.

Commenting on the element of style, Wordsworth denounces the 'gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers' and instead prefers to write poetry in a 'selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation'. For him, there is no real distinction between the 'language of prose and metrical composition'.

NOTES

1.2.1 The Poem and Important Explanations: *Tintern Abbey*

FIVE years have past; five summers, with the length
Of five long winters! and again I hear
These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs
With a soft inland murmur. — Once again
Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
That on a wild secluded scene impress
Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect
The landscape with the quiet of the sky.
The day is come when I again repose
Here, under this dark sycamore, and view

In these lines, the speaker begins by conveying to the reader that a lot of time has passed since he had last visited the banks of the River Wye. In the next few lines, the poet starts reminiscing about his last visit and how the visit had left upon him a lasting impression. The speaker then begins to describe the 'steep and lofty cliffs' and says that they are just like he remembered them. Wordsworth reiterates that he has come 'again' and talks about how the mountain cliffs impress upon him thoughts of solitude and seclusion. The poet expresses his sense of peace as once again he finds himself witnessing the merging of the vast landscape with the endless sky.

These plots of cottage-ground, these orchard-tufts,
Which at this season, with their unripe fruits,
Are clad in one green hue, and lose themselves
'Mid groves and copses. Once again I see
These hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines
Of sportive wood run wild: these pastoral farms,
Green to the very door; and wreaths of smoke
Sent up, in silence, from among the trees!
With some uncertain notice, as might seem
Of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods,
Or of some Hermit's cave, where by his fire
The Hermit sits alone.

In these lines, the poet muses over the tranquil landscape with the cottages, the orchards laden with their unripe bounty of fruit. The green hue is soothing to

the poet as he once again recalls having seen the hedge rows, pastoral farms and wreathes of smoke rising to the sky from the dwellings of vagrants in the 'houseless woods'.

NOTES

These beauteous forms,
Through a long absence, have not been to me
As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:
But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
And passing even into my purer mind,
With tranquil restoration: — feelings too
Of unremembered pleasure: such, perhaps,
As have no slight or trivial influence
On that best portion of a good man's life,
His little, nameless, unremembered, acts
Of kindness and of love. Nor less, I trust,
To them I may have owed another gift,
Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,
In which the burthen of the mystery,
In which the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world,
Is lightened: — that serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently lead us on, —
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul:
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.

The poet in these lines contemplates how in the last five years, when he had not seen this landscape, its memories had remained with him as fresh as ever. He says that often in the din and rush of the city life, he had derived in a wearied state a soothing sensation by recalling those peaceful moments he had spent there; those memories restored tranquillity within him. The speaker says that such beauteous forms also elicited within him thoughts of some 'unremembered pleasure' of countless little 'unremembered acts of kindness and of love', which for a moment may appear trifle but endow endless riches to human lives. It is these moments

which lend a sublime feeling, a blessed mood to our lives and lessens the burden of leading our lives in a harsh, unintelligible world. He says that such a serene feeling blesses us in a manner that our corporeal frame is suspended and we almost become a 'living soul' which is in a state of harmony with the universe.

NOTES

In darkness and amid the many shapes
Of joyless daylight; when the fretful stir
Unprofitable, and the fever of the world,
Have hung upon the beatings of my heart —
How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee,
O sylvan Wye! thou wanderer thro' the woods,
How often has my spirit turned to thee!
And now, with gleams of half-extinguished thought,
With many recognitions dim and faint,
And somewhat of a sad perplexity, The picture of the mind revives again:
While here I stand, not only with the sense
Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts
That in this moment there is life and food
For future years. And so I dare to hope,
Though changed, no doubt, from what I was when first
I came among these hills; when like a roe
I bounded o'er the mountains, by the sides
Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams,
Wherever nature led: more like a man
Flying from something that he dreads, than one
Who sought the thing he loved. For nature then
(The coarser pleasures of my boyish days,
And their glad animal movements all gone by)
To me was all in all. — I cannot paint
What then I was. The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colours and their forms, were then to me
An appetite; a feeling and a love, That had no need of a remoter charm,
By thought supplied, nor any interest
Unborrowed from the eye. — That time is past,
And all its aching joys are now no more,

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And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this
Faint I, nor mourn nor murmur, other gifts
Have followed; for such loss, I would believe,
Abundant recompence. For I have learned
To look on nature, not as in the hour
Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
The still, sad music of humanity,
Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue.

The speaker says that often perturbed by the fretful stir of this world, he has turned to the river Wye for succour, and that when he stands here again, he is rejuvenated by the belief that he can find solace to sustain him through the coming years in future. He then goes on to say that he is no more the same individual who had come to visit river Wye five years ago when he was like a roe full of optimism and energy. He says that he cannot relate what the sounding cataract meant to him or what feelings the tall rock induced within his being. The speaker says that today with more experience, he can no longer indulge in boyish pleasures that he derived from experiencing the outward beauties of nature; rather, he has started deriving pleasure from the solace that nature offers to the troubled soul. He says that he has learnt to see in nature the power to 'chasten and subdue' disturbing elements.

And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still
A lover of the meadows and the woods,
And mountains; and of all that we behold
From this green earth; of all the mighty world
Of eye, and ear, — both what they half create,
And what perceive; well pleased to recognise
In nature and the language of the sense,
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul Of all my moral being.

NOTES

Nor perchance,
If I were not thus taught, should I the more
Suffer my genial spirits to decay:
For thou art with me here upon the banks
Of this fair river; thou my dearest Friend,
My dear, dear Friend; and in thy voice I catch
The language of my former heart, and read
Of thy wild eyes. Oh! yet a little while
May I behold in thee what I was once,
My dear, dear Sister! and this prayer I make,
Knowing that Nature never did betray
The heart that loved her; 'tis her privilege,
Through all the years of this our life, to lead
From joy to joy: for she can so inform
The mind that is within us, so impress
With quietness and beauty, and so feed
With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,
Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,
Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
The dreary intercourse of daily life,
Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb
Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold
Is full of blessings. Therefore let the moon
Shine on thee in thy solitary walk;
And let the misty mountain-winds be free
To blow against thee: and, in after years,
When these wild ecstasies shall be matured
Into a sober pleasure; when thy mind
Shall be a mansion for all lovely forms,
Thy memory be as a dwelling-place
For all sweet sounds and harmonies; oh! then,
If solitude, or fear, or pain, or grief,
Should be thy portion, with what healing thoughts
Of tender joy wilt thou remember me,
And these my exhortations! Nor, perchance —
If I should be where I no more can hear
Thy voice, nor catch from thy wild eyes these gleams
Of past existence — wilt thou then forget

NOTES

That on the banks of this delightful stream
We stood together; and that I, so long
A worshipper of Nature, hither came
Unwearied in that service: rather say
With warmer love — oh! with far deeper zeal
Of holier love. Nor wilt thou then forget,
That after many wanderings, many years
Of absence, these steep woods and lofty cliffs,
And this green pastoral landscape, were to me
More dear, both for themselves and for thy sake!

The poet feels the presence of something divine in every aspect of nature that fills his entire being with a sense of joy and peace. The speaker says he continues to be a lover of nature and finds repose in its bounties. The poet then turns to his sister who has accompanied him to this visit and in whom he finds his dearest companion. The poet says that he sees in his sister an image of his former self. Addressing his sister, the poet says that he is making a prayer to nature to lead him from joy to joy eternally and all the while induce in their beings lofty and sublime thoughts so that the 'dreary intercourse' of every day mundane life does not make them insensitive to the beauties of nature. He says that 'memory' serves 'as a dwelling-place 'For all sweet sounds and harmonies' and it is these memories that will heal her soul if 'solitude', fear or pain assail her in this life. The poet ends the poem by saying that the memory of the two of them standing together as worshippers of nature will help them overcome years of absence from these beautiful 'steep woods and lofty cliffs' and refresh in their mind's eye what the green pastoral landscape meant to them.

1.2.2 Critical Appreciation

Tintern Abbey was composed in the year 1798 and it is considered to be one of the most significant of all the works of Wordsworth. One of his most celebrated and critically acclaimed poems, it is seen by critics as a record of the different stages in the growth of Wordsworth's poetic genius and imagination. Critics often regard it as a miniature epic that thematically anticipates his epical endeavour, *The Prelude*. *Tintern Abbey* brings out much of Wordsworth's poetic and philosophical beliefs. Written in blank verse, unrhymed iambic pentameter, the poem comprises the elements of an ode, conversation poem as well as dramatic monologue. In the opening lines, the poet is seen meditating upon his earlier visit to the River Wye. The memories of his earlier visit fill him with a deep sense of 'tranquil restoration'. The narrator recalls that five years earlier when he had visited River Wye, he had almost a sublime, transcendental experience; what perplexes and saddens Wordsworth is the fact that he is no longer able to experience that same feeling. In the first twenty- five lines, Wordsworth solely deals with the sensory perception and appreciation of nature's beauty. It is in these lines that Wordsworth's thematic

principle comes to the fore, that being, the interconnectedness of man and nature. The opening line connotes the passage of time by apprehending it through the change of seasons and the sweet soft murmur of the Wye. In these lines, Wordsworth draws a relationship between man, nature and time.

In the next few lines, Wordsworth proceeds to develop the link between the mind and nature. He says that the lofty cliffs amidst the virgin seclusion impress upon him the feeling that the earth is merging with the sky in a divine unison.

In the lines 26-50, he proceeds to address the effect that Wye and its soothing transcendental beauty has upon him. In the Lines 59-110, Wordsworth explores in depth how he apprehends enlightenment through nature, while the rest of the poem is an exploration of his relationship with his beloved sister Dorothy and thoughts about the future.

Kaiser Jr., an American evangelical scholar, writes, 'In Wordsworth's *Lines Written a few Miles above Tintern Abbey*, the narrator melts into nature, and they form one infinite, contiguous existence. Awed at the prospect of infinitely contiguous reality, he is roused to the sublime state'. The poet seems to find joy and solace in completely absorbing himself into nature. The poet succeeds in creating an illusion of an infinite connectedness between the landscape of the sky and the poet's soul. The narrator gradually weaves the magic upon the reader too and engages him by describing the visual aspects of the secluded scene.

The sanctity of the tranquil surroundings enables the poet to have a sublime, transcendental experience. Again and again, Wordsworth emphasizes on the solitude and the silence which induces a sense of well-being and contentment. The poet becomes so enchanted with the beauty of the landscape that he becomes embroiled in even the minutest aspects such as 'wreathes of smoke sent up, in silence'. Kaiser writes that so powerfully intense and passionate is Wordsworth's representation that he almost invokes the landscape in the mind's eye of the reader; to quote Kaiser, 'Wordsworth paints a picture, not unlike a Turner watercolour, blending the landscape with complementary hues, and lending a still greater sense of harmony to the scene. One can imagine the narrator reposing under his sycamore, scanning the pastoral landscape, his eye focusing on the hedge rows, copses and country cottages, then panning backward to notice the mysterious wreathes of smoke above the trees. He is effectively absorbed into the landscape, as has already happened to the other mysterious inhabitants of the valley. Like the hedgerows indicate sheep herding, so too do the wreathes of smoke indicate the presence of these unseen folk'.

Wordsworth also explains his vision of mutual intercourse or communion between nature and the mind. Retreating into the solitude of his memories, Wordsworth tries to efface the din of cities. He recalls how in the most troubled times, amidst the 'hours of weariness', these memories of nature's calmness gave him strength and gave him 'sensations sweet'. In the following lines, he once again lays emphasis on the connectedness between nature, time and man.

NOTES

Wordsworth says that so strong is the power of nature to soothe frayed souls that even while he was far away from the lap of nature, he could perceive the beauty of nature with his mind's eye, and that through this communion with nature, he felt a sense of peace and connectedness. Through his connection with nature, he is able to draw on the boundless potential of the earth.

In the lines 36-50, Wordsworth expounds the crux of the poem as he describes endowment of his prophetic vision. Wordsworth says that nature invokes within him a natural sense of tranquillity which enables him to draw on nature's potential through self-surrender to both nature and his own mind. Wordsworth suggests pantheism here as he says that the tranquil mood envelops him completely, leading him into a state akin to a trance. As Kaiser writes, 'This trance lends Wordsworth the wisdom and insight to "see into the life of things". This "blessed mood" invokes not only a mental and emotional change, but a physical change as well. Wordsworth's body seems to almost enter a stasis, not unlike what appears to occur in transcendental meditation. The body slows down to a point where it does not distract us, and indeed all corporeal things disappear'.

Another critic, William Christie, writes that as Wordsworth would 'have us believe, … *Tintern Abbey* is a poem of emancipation and enlightenment, discovering and celebrating the harmony - indeed, unity - of man and Nature, as had Coleridge's *This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison* and *Frost at Midnight*. Far from being an "exploration", *Tintern Abbey* represents on at least one level an escape from the "dark passages" of life; an escape, literally and metaphorically, from "lonely rooms: mid the din of towns and cities", for it is thus incarcerated that the poet feels "the burthen of the mystery" and "the heavy and the weary weight of all this unintelligible world" most acutely. The escape itself is, by turns, upwards (transcendence), outwards (geographical relocation), and, ultimately, both'.

Of all the works of Wordsworth, critics assert that *Tintern Abbey* is the most paradoxical. It is seen by a critic as 'at once highly derivative and highly innovative: derivative, in that it is rooted in the eighteenth-century recollective, topographical tradition of Thomson, Warton, Akenside, Cowper, Bowles, Rogers, Southey, and even Goldsmith; innovative, in that it initiates a descriptive and psychological depth and fusion – a poetic language expressive of the imaginative co-operation of mind and nature - as well as achieving the unapologetic audacity or reach that we identify as "the Romantic sublime".'

Wordsworth on his second visit to the River Wye is consistently drawing a comparison between his memories of his earlier visit or 'mental revisiting' and the experience he has in context of those memories in his 'physical revisiting'. He is representing a 'mental landscape' by trying to superimpose it upon the present landscape. This develops in the poet a deep sense of unease and perplexity as he is unable to apprehend the Wye with as innocent and calm mental state as he had done five years earlier. In these five years, the poet's disillusionment with the hollowness of the revolutionary fervour of the French Revolution has incapacitated the poet's ability to indulge in the sublime beauty of nature as before.

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Tintern Abbey has been seen as a holistic statement of Wordsworth's philosophy of nature. The poet recalls how as a boy, when he still retained the innocence of childhood, he '*like a roe / I bounded o'er the mountains, by the sides / Of the deep river, and the lonely streams'* (lines 67-69), had absorbed the 'sensations sweet'. It is these 'sensations' which his adult mind recalls to draw sustenance amidst the din of the city and fill his being with a sense of 'tranquil restoration'. Not only that, he says that these memories

Have no slight or trivial influence
On that best portion of a good man's life,
His little, nameless, unremembered, acts
Of kindness and of love" (lines 29-35).

Wordsworth asserts that nature's peaceful environment rejuvenates a person's soul so that even amid the stress of city life, one can find solace and that is the reason why he still is,

A lover of the meadows and the woods,
And mountains; and of all that we behold
From this green earth; . . . . .
. . . . . . well pleased to recognize
In nature and the language of the sense,
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being. (102-111)

Check Your Progress

1. When was *Lyrical Ballads* published?
2. What, according to Wordsworth, should be the subject and style of poetry?
3. How has nature helped the poet escape the din and rush of city life in *Tintern Abbey*?
4. Define the 'romantic sublime'.

1.3 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. *Lyrical Ballads* was published in 1798; the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* is widely believed to have started the English Romantic Movement.
2. According to Wordsworth, the subject of poetry should be drawn from common life. He further denounced the use of gaudy phraseology in poetry and believed that poetry should embody the real language used by common men.

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3. In *Tintern Abbey*, the poet escaped the din and rush of city life by delving into his memories of nature. In the most troubled times, memories of nature gave the poet solace and comfort.
4. The romantic sublime, according to critics, is the poetic expression of the communion between nature and mind. Wordsworth departed from the tradition of eighteenth century writers such as Thomson, Warton, Akenside, Cowper, Bowles, Rogers, Southey and Goldsmith; he initiated a new form of poetry which was descriptive and had psychological depth.

1.4 SUMMARY

- William Wordsworth, one of the most critically acclaimed English Romantic poet, took a different trajectory from his predecessors like John Dyer (1700-1758), James Thomson (1700-1748) and Thomas Gray (1716-1771) who wrote about nature in a conventional manner.
- The French Revolution deeply impacted Wordsworth and the latter's poetry has been found infused with the ideals of the French Revolution.
- The Romantic Movement primarily focused on the theme of nature. Wordsworth believed that poets should write about nature, children, the poor and the common people.
- Wordsworth's seminal poem *Tintern Abbey,* published in the *Lyrical Ballads* explores the relationship between man, nature and time as the poet visits River Wye for the second time in his life.
- *Tintern Abbey* is written in blank verse and unrhymed iambic pentameter. It comprises the elements of an ode, conversation poem and a dramatic monologue.
- Wordsworth criticizes the 'gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers' and stresses on the need to write poetry in a 'selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation'.
- The poem *Tintern Abbey* begins with the poet reminiscing about his last visit to River Wye.
- The poet contemplates his memories of River Wye and realizes that even when he had not visited the landscape, its memories had remained with him, fresh as ever. He states that he had derived solace from these memories when he was busy with the city life.
- The poet further says that he can no longer derive pleasure by simply experiencing the outward beauties of nature. He has now found comfort for his troubled soul in nature.

1.5 KEY WORDS

- **Iambic Pentameter:** It is a line of verse that consists of five metrical feet wherein one unstressed syllable is followed by a stressed syllable.
- **Dramatic Monologue:** It is a poem which is in the form of a narrative by an imagined person and the speaker unintentionally reveals nuances of his character while talking about a particular event.
- **Pantheism:** It is a belief system that equates God with the universe. For Wordsworth, Pantheism is the awareness of a life-force in nature.

1.6 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. How has the narrator's second visit to River Wye in the poem *Tintern Abbey* differed from the first one?
2. What is the dichotomy between city life and nature in Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey*?
3. How has the French Revolution impacted Wordsworth's relationship with nature?

Long Answer Questions

1. Discuss Wordsworth's theory of poetry.
2. Critically analyse the English Romantic Movement and the contribution of Wordsworth to it.
3. Examine the relationship between man, nature and time, as explored in *Tintern Abbey*.
4. Critically evaluate Wordsworth's poem *Tintern Abbey*.

1.7 FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 2 S.T. COLERIDGE

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Structure

2.0 Introduction
2.1 Objectives
2.2 Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*
2.2.1 Analysis of the Poem
2.3 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
2.4 Summary
2.5 Key Words
2.6 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
2.7 Further Readings

2.0 INTRODUCTION

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was a renowned English poet, critic and philosopher whose exemplary contribution towards the Romantic Movement in England established his place in the literary milieu. During the formative years of the French Revolution, he actively wrote pamphlets and inspired a future generation of writers. His collaboration with Charles Lamb, Robert Southey and Charles Lloyd is also noteworthy. However, his most prominent work is *Biographia Literaria,* which revealed his philosophical stance and views on literary criticism.

Coleridge's literary works include poems like *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and *Kubla Khan*. *Kubla Khan: or, A Vision in a Dream* was written in 1797 and published in 1816, at the prompting of Lord Byron. Coleridge composed the poem a night after experiencing an opium-infused dream after reading a work about Xanadu, the summer palace of Mongol ruler Kublai Khan. In the preface to *Kubla Khan*, Coleridge narrates how he wrote the lines of the poem that came to him after waking up from the dream. The poem could not be completed as he was interrupted by a 'person from Porlock'.

Coleridge struggled with several physical ailments and opium addiction throughout his life. His meditative and prophetic poems were initially put off by early readers, but survived the test of time and became classics of English Romantic Movement.

2.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Understand Coleridge's philosophical stance and views on criticism
- Analyse the impact of socio-political events on Coleridge's works
- Critically evaluate *Kubla Khan*

2.2 COLERIDGE'S *KUBLA KHAN*

S.T Coleridge was born in 1772 and was a student of Jesus College between 1791 and 1794. He married Sarah Fricker, the sister of Robert Southey's wife, in 1797. As far as poetry is concerned, William Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy greatly influenced Coleridge. Notably, Coleridge and Thomas De Quincey shared a similar trajectory in terms of career path, their failure of finding the sanctuary of home and life-threatening opium addiction. Since the poetic inspiration were sparse, Coleridge's quantum of his best work is conversely proportionate to its quality. His interest in German Metaphysics changed him from a poet to a philosopher and it is because of his interest that he became an outstanding critic.

Coleridge attempted to reveal the unknown aspects of the soul through poetry. His emphasis on music was primarily because he wanted to go beyond the limitations of literature. However, his lack of self-confidence and addiction to opium negatively impacted his writing, as a result of which he did not complete his ambitious works.

In broad terms, his poetic career can be classified into the following four periods:

First Period (1794-1796)

- *Song of the Pixies*
- *Lines on an Autumnal Evening* and *Lewti (1794)*
- *Religious Musings (1795-96)*

Second Period (1796-97)

- *Ode on the Departing Year*
- *This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison*
- *Frost at Midnight*
- *Fears in solitude*

Third Period

- *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*
- *Christabel* and
- *Kubla Khan*

Fourth Period

- *Dejection: an Ode*
- *Love*

The fourth period, which was the last phase of his career, saw a decline in Coleridge's inspiration and achievements.

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Fig. 2.1 *Samuel Taylor Coleridge*

(a) Coleridge as a critic

Coleridge is recognized largely as a critic rather than as a poet because of his prominent work *Biographia Literaria* which revealed strong theories of criticism for the first time. *Biographia Literaria* includes a criticism of Wordsworth's preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* as well as Wordsworth's poems. In this light, Cazamian says, 'Certain intentions, as well as certain successes or failings of Wordsworth are caught and illuminated to their depths; so searching is the light, that it is even cruel.'

Despite his inclination towards the aspect of romance, he maintained objectivity in his criticism and looked at facts with an unbiased outlook. Even T. S. Eliot's criticisms were greatly influenced by Coleridge's perspective. Coleridge with his perceptions could have reached any depth in art and discovered the corresponding force underneath. Cazamian observations regarding Coleridge's Shakespeare Criticism states: 'His remarks on Shakespeare show a sound intuition of the profound unit of dramatic art. His imaginative perception seldom fails him and so his famous distinction between fancy and imagination, despite its mysticism is so convincing and revealing. Fancy, according to Coleridge is the mechanical joining of impressions stored in memory whereas imagination is an organic development of the mind which has the power to reveal the essential and even the ultimate truth of life.'

Coleridge's inclination towards German Metaphysics converted him into a philosopher as well. This amalgamation of his poetic self with that of philosophical stance turned him into a wonderful critic.

(b) Coleridge as a poet

Coleridge was born at a time when poetic age was at its peak and it continued to exhibit creativity for almost three decades. Every great writer is inextricably linked with the life and thought of people in the contemporary world. The Renaissance was the originating point; it was an age of questioning, self-awareness and self-discovery. Man had started exploring great potentials of human mind.

Logical reasoning was put into proper perspectives in the seventeenth century. This century also witnessed the invention of science and the new inclination towards materialism. Sir Isaac Newton overturned human behaviour while Locke's philosophy attempted to explain the universe in logical and materialistic manner. The eighteenth century reinstated 'society' on these postulates and brought forth the Industrial Revolution that provided for assured comfort and prosperity. There were certain writers such as Blake and Gray who brought forward new perspectives until a powerful fresh wind overturned everything completely. A fresh wind of 'freedom' started blowing in the air. Wordsworth said that 'it was the freedom of going into Nature and breathing to one's fill her pure and purifying air.' On the other hand, Coleridge said that 'it was the freedom of entering the strange and mysterious zone of the supernatural.' Byron and Shelley desired an innovative social order that was grounded upon intellectual freedom, scientific reasoning and impartial political system while Keats sang, 'Ever let the fancy roam/pleasure never is at home.'

Although there was a major influence of native factors, an emphasis on pattern, order and the concept of 'totality' within measurable terms came from France and Germany. German philosophers of the eighteenth century were trying to explore emotional patterns of behaviour in man, the world of mental imagery and hidden areas of cognizance which can be seen in the German Literature of the time. The eighteenth century German Literature considered supernatural as an extension of the known world of nature, often strange and mysterious. Coleridge was influenced with these ideas during his short visit to Germany which was reinforced further with his inclination towards German Literature. The French Revolution was another factor that greatly influenced the British poets.

The French Revolution began with a sudden and aggressive outbreak to attain freedom – freedom from tyranny of dominion, from dictates of the Church, from superstitious notion and public traditions. In fact, England became the pioneer in the world of thoughts and systematic development of ideas. However, England's freedom battle goes back to the times of Medieval History which continued till Renaissance. Crucial events such as the Reformation, Civil War, Commonwealth etc., were the source of inspiration for many countries. Though French insurgence can be quoted to be an outcome of the writings of Voltaire and Rousseau, their influences are sourced mainly from the English proponents of Political and Social independence. What became the undertone of poetic subtlety and ethnical expansion in England became an aggressive and armed uprising in France against kingdoms

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and other institutions associated with it. The initial upbringing was attractive for the English poets and several artists including Wordsworth and Coleridge visited France to become an active participant of French Revolution. The French Revolution soon took a bloody and blind turn and the artists distanced themselves from it. However, the fundamental basics of the uprising had taken a deep root in the English mind and caused a major change in their lives, thoughts and attitude. The French atmosphere became characterised by greed, opportunism, deception and hostility which was witnessed by Coleridge as well. Wordsworth later opined that his stay in France was a 'waste of years', Coleridge also shared the same opinion.

Despite their dislike for the revolution, both Wordsworth and Coleridge carried along the fundamental thoughts that had provoked the revolution. Economic prosperity or high social ranking should not determine whether a person is good or great; in fact, it should be the soul that should decide upon the category. This idea induced in them a strong feeling to perform a moral role. While Wordsworth adopted the role of the 'teacher', Coleridge became an oriental 'guru' and the two literary figures took the readers to a visionary world where astonishment became a precondition.

Hence, being influenced by different exotic sources, Coleridge penned down three meritorious lyrics namely: *Kubla Khan, The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and *Christabel*. His works displayed the following basic qualities:

- Artistic treatment of the supernatural
- Medievalism
- Herman nature and external nature: Relationship in reciprocity
- Creation of a dream-world authenticated by psychoanalysis
- Imaginative flights
- Lyricism

2.2.1 Analysis of the Poem

Kubla Khan, written in 1797, is considered one of the best works of Coleridge. It was published first on the insistence of Lord Byron in 1816. The introduction focuses upon circumstances which prompted him to write the poem:

'In summer days of 1797, the ailing Author, retiring into an abandoned farmhouse between Porlock and Lintan, on the Exmoor margins of Somerset and Devonshire fell asleep in his chair under the effects of an analgesic prescribed resulting out of indisposition. At the very moment he was reading the following sentence or words of the same substance, in "purchase" *pilgrimage:* "Here the Khan Kubla commanded a palace to be built and a stately garden thereunto and thus ten miles in a fertile land were covered with a wall." The author kept on sleeping unsounded for almost 3 hours, in this duration he had the most vivid confidence of having composed around 200 – 300 lines; if that indeed can be called composition in which all the images rose up before him as things, with a parallel production of the correspondent expressions, without any sensation or

consciousness of effort. As he awoke he appeared to himself to recollect the whole, arranged pen, ink and paper instantly to write down the lines that are here conserved. Suddenly a person from Porlock came for business and detained him for more than an hour, as he returned back he could still recollect some vague and dim images of the purpose of the vision while the rest have fade away.'

Coleridge therefore states that the poem is a 'fragment' and more 'of a dream'. This poem does not relate to any statement or message derived from an idea but simply an imaginative exploration of the invention of rudiments of art and the relation between the natural and supernatural. It is similarly powerful in its literal and symbolic means differentiating the common and the strange, the immediate and the remote, the worldly and the other-worldly.

Structure

The poem is divided into three parts, first of which is the elaborative one which describes the pleasure palace of Kubla Khan in thirty-six lines. Three stanzas in an order of ten, twenty, and six lines correspondingly constitute the total of the first part. The second part has only five lines while the rest of the thirteen lines constitute the third part.

The poet has discussed an Abyssinian singing girl in the second part of the poem whom he had seen in a 'vision'. The final part draws the picture of an inspired poet who can bring radical changes to the world.

The story revolves around Kubla Khan who was a powerful king in ancient China. He once ordered a building to be constructed of majestic pleasure-house in Xanadu which was covered by the sacred river Alph. Alph made Xanadu fertile in the circumference of ten miles which was surrounded by walls and towers. Its land was flourished with dazzling floras, snaky streams and odoriferous flowers on aromatic trees. It was also covered with old mountains and forests having green patches of grass in the middle which grew bright with sunshine. The river passed through the dark and immeasurable caves before falling into a dark Sea.

However, it is the mysterious chasm that is most appealing. It was a brutal and barren place like one we would imagine to be the haunt of a woman who is crying out for her satanic lover beneath the crescent moon.

A strong outflow of water was spurting out of the gorge and deep below there was an uninterrupted chaos. The heaving of the earth consequently throws out water through the gorge, carrying along large and small chunks of stone like rebounding hail or scattered grain. Fountain coming out of these rocks and stones turns towards the Alps, the sacred river that follows the twisty path all through the valley and reaches the bottomless and mysterious caves before making a piercing fall into the 'lifeless' ocean. Kubla Khan in this state of tumultuousness heard the voices of ancestors foretelling war (i.e. destruction of this idyllic place and palace).

The pleasure house had its shadows fall onto the river waves in its middle. The fountain and the caves also were making noises and mixing with each other, thus creating musical notes. Not only was the orchestra astounding but the very

sight of the pleasure dome that stood on the caves of ice and flooded with sunshine was also amazing.

Coleridge was prompted with a vision that he once had of an Abyssinian maid who played on her dulcimer and sang of Mount Abora. Her music and the song were melodious enough to make the poet think of reviving it in his poetry. By doing so, the poet would then enjoy blissful delight and craft an art as amiable as Kubla Khan's Palace. The music then would epithet the mysteries of universe created by God, the mystery of contraries woven together, the dichotomy of light and darkness, life and death, the 'sunny dome' and 'caves of ice'.

Interpretation

This poem of Coleridge seems to be a fragment or a sequence of fragments. At first, it brings forth a palace that the poet had heard of and then it talks about the singer which the poet had dreamt of. In the end, it touches on a poet that he had wistfully envisaged. Overall, the poem is most consistent, methodical and one of the most focused poems in English Literature. The simplest answer to several questions that enquires what this poem is all about is that 'it is about poetry'. The first part requires symbolic interpretation while the second part clearly signifies the purpose.

Kubla Khan wanted a pleasure house to be constructed in Xanadu. Abrupt introduction of the names in the work makes the memories of John Donne live in our minds; Coleridge, with the same unabashed deftness, paves our way to the centre of the theme. The reader is quickly taken to the strange complexities of the world of creative imagination.

The word 'decree' is important; it signifies desire, order and determination. The name 'Xanadu' denotes isolation; it is symptomatic of something that is exotic, cryptic, desire-evoking and provocative in life. Alph which is a river of holistic values covers Xanadu in ten miles of circumference. It passes through the garden which in itself is a pursuit for the ultimate reality, 'the desire of the moth for the star' in art and finally ends up into a great fall that meets the dark or the Sunless Sea on the other end. The area is fenced with walls and towers in its surrounding often in miles and covers gardens and small winding rivers as well. The garden is bloomed with trees bearing odorous flowers. It has forests which are as old as the hills holding the roots; this refers to the beauty of ageless art, its widespread validity and charisma. However, its ravine is the most astonishing and mysterious thing that goes down the slope of a green hill across cedar trees. The poet in it has beautifully created the mystical world to evoke mysterious depths of art which steers us in a horrified and benumbed environment. The gorge perhaps is the immeasurable, unconscious reservoir of human memories, impressions and dreams, a barbarous place beyond the reach of knowledge or science to be explored.

At the bottom of the gorge, there is continuous upheaval going on which appears like boiling of a thick liquid and resounds like the earth is taking a breath. 'Fast thick pants' suggest the sexual act reflecting the creative processes of the

earth. Water is ejected out of the earth's belly in the form of a fountain and along with it comes out massive boulders like pitter-pattering hailstones or scattered grain. The fountain takes the form of the sacred river Alph. Pure poetry comes into existence from the panting tumult (the creative urge) and courses via a fertile land (the creative process), it is holy (purifying) and ends up in oblivion (lifeless ocean). The entire process delivers us an important message that every art however, beautiful and heavenly, is susceptible to destruction because wars are inevitable. The ancestral voice is the voice of human experience. The weird dichotomy of man lies in the fact that he creates art 'par excellence' on one hand and fights like his prehistoric antecedent with neighbour and fellowman, causing destruction on the other hand. In intellect he can rise very high but in morality he can stoop to the lowest. He has raised great monuments and he has also felled them. Wars have razed beautiful civilizations to dust.

The shadow of the pleasure dome falling on the waves and covering half of its breadth created a beautiful view. The intermingling sounds that came out from the depth of caves and the gurgling sound of the fountain were creating melodious notes of the music. The Palace was a miraculous structure of mixed opposites; the top of it was flooded with sunshine while its foundation is laid in the caves of ice. This resembles the great art that substantiates the spirit of life where as life is a composite of contradictory experiences.

The poet then proceeds to the second part which he has dedicated to his vision of an Abyssinian damsel playing on her dulcimer and singing of Mount Abora in the first few lines. In the remaining portion of the second part, the poet has expressed his wish to relive the perfection of the Abyssinian maid's song in his own poetry.

The poet has visualized a saga-like mental image of an inspiring medieval singer of the Middle East whose song would revolutionize people, their stale customs and dead habits and usher them into a new life. The poet has portrayed the pied piper of Hamelin with 'flashing eyes' and 'floating hair' whose flute would attract children to the extent that they leave their homes to follow his path, however unknown and adventurous it might be. Like his contemporaries, Coleridge also wanted to be a revolutionary, a preacher and a Messiah.

The poet was aware of the fact that people are conservative and fear to undergo a big change; in fact, they would prefer to live in 'pig satisfaction'. Hence, they would restrain the person who brings about change and would cease his functionality via the magical means of threading a circle three times around him. Poets for them are divinely inspired and immortal just as Keat's nightingale who is 'not born for death'.

Overall, Coleridge visualizes the perfection of art in all the three pictures i.e. Kubla Khan, Abyssinian Maid and the Visionary Poet. The first picture ponders over the complexities and contradictions of life; second is the art that goes beyond life and grow heavenly while the third is the picture of an art that transforms life by impregnating new dreams and optimism in human beings. Hence, it is a well-knit,

highly concentrated poem about the nature and function of art.

As a Romantic Poem

'Romanticism in an extraordinary development of imaginative sensibility' – if what C. H. Herford claims is true about Romanticism, then Kubla Khan is amongst the most romantic poems in English Literature. It is perhaps the most extreme end of imaginative aesthesia; Xanadu is an imaginary place and Kubla Khan, more than being a character of history, has been treated imaginatively as being a fantasist designer. The 'Romantic Chasm', Savage Place', 'Woman Wailing', 'Demon Lover', 'complex model of the palace, 'Sunny Dome founded on the Caves of Ice', 'amalgamation of Natural and Supernatural' – all of them are the creation of extreme imagination; the poem reaches to even greater heights of idealism when Kubla Khan heard Ancestral Voices prophesying war. Everything is in the romantic spirit and the palace is exactly what he had in his dreams.

Inaccessibility in time and space are the attributes of romanticism. Kubla Khan is not only an ancient king but also a pre-historic mythological character in the poem. The name 'Xanadu', just like 'Lilliput' and 'Brobdingnag', suggests the sound of isolation. Alph and Mount Abora are also distinct words. Proper names provide an exciting and illuminated platform for the poet to take an imaginative free flight. The supernatural portrayal of the women wailing for her demon lover was another romantic attribute of Coleridge in the poem.

The mental imagery of nature and its incarnation as seen in the poem is a typical characteristic of romantic poetry. Nature appears to reflect human experience, wish and ambition. We derive the actual meaning through our imagination as we reach deep into the poem to discover the harmony.

The Supernatural Element

Coleridge's influences of German Poetry of eighteenth century are predictable in extensive use of supernatural in his work. Supernaturalism is so powerful a component in his rhymes and he made it so natural for the readers that it appears to be an essential component of the entire theme. Supernaturalism is even more powerful in *Christabel* and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Kubla Khan is a bit different yet it appears to have supernatural elements right from the description of Xanadu to the mysterious weaving of a circle round the 'troubadour'. The description of the palace makes it another-worldly construction; the Abyssinian maid singing of Mount Abora is a dream vision and the poet with ebullient wildness appears to be the one who visits in dreams and becomes invisible in the real world.

But the supernatural is specifically mentioned when the 'Savage Place' is described as 'Holy and Enchanted': 'As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted, by woman wailing for her demon lover.'

Supernaturalism is not ornamentation in Coleridge's verse; it is an organic component of the entire theme. The natural and the supernatural are coalesced into one entity, in fact it is his imaginability that has made this miracle possible.

In Xanadu did Kublai Khan
A stately Pleasure-Dome decree,
Where Alph, the sacred river ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.
So twice five miles of fertile ground
With walls and towers was girdled 'round,
And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills,
Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;
And here were forests ancient as the hills,
Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.
But, oh! That deep, romantic chasm which slanted
Down the green hill, athwart a cedarn cover:
A savage place! As holy and enchanted
As e'er beneath the waning moon was haunted
By woman wailing for her Demon Lover!
And from this chasm with ceaseless turmoil seething,
As if this Earth in fast, thick pants were breathing,
A mighty fountain momently was forced,
Amid whose swift, half-intermitted burst
Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,
Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail;
And 'midst these dancing rocks at once and ever,
It flung up momently the sacred river!
Five miles meandering with ever a mazy motion,
Through wood and dale the sacred river ran,
Then reached the caverns measureless to man,
And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean.
And 'mid this tumult, Kublai heard from far
Ancestral voices prophesying war!
The shadow of the Dome of Pleasure
Floated midway on the waves,
Where was heard the mingled measure
From the fountain and the caves.
It was a miracle of rare device:
A sunny Pleasure-Dome with caves of ice!
A damsel with a dulcimer
In a vision once I saw:
It was an Abyssinian maid,

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And on her dulcimer she played,
Singing of Mount Abora.
Could I revive within me
Her symphony and song,
To such deep delight 'twould win me
That with music loud and long,
I would build that dome within the air!
That sunny dome, those caves of ice,
And all who heard should see them there,
And all should cry: "Beware! Beware!
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
Weave a circle 'round him thrice,
And close your eyes in holy dread:
For he on honeydew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise!"

Check Your Progress

1. Name the Romantic poet who grew disillusioned with the French Revolution and called it a 'waste of years'.
2. Name three works of Coleridge which has incorporated supernaturalism.
3. Why was Coleridge's work *Kubla Khan* left incomplete?
4. When was *Kubla Khan* published?
5. Into how many parts is *Kubla Khan* divided?
6. What does the name 'Xanadu' in *Kubla Khan* denote?

2.3 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. William Wordsworth grew disillusioned with the French Revolution and called it a 'waste of years'.
2. Three works of Coleridge in which incorporates an element of the supernatural are Kubla Khan, The Rime of the Ancient Mariner and Christabel.
3. Coleridge was unable to complete the poem as he was interrupted by a 'person from Porlock'. He wrote the poem a night after experiencing an opium-infused dream after reading a work about Xanadu, the summer palace of Mongol ruler Kublai Khan.
4. *Kubla Khan* was composed 1797 and published in 1816, at the prompting of Lord Byron.

5. Kubla Khan is divided into three parts.
6. The word 'Xanadu' used by Coleridge in *Kubla Khan* denotes isolation. It also indicates something that is exotic, cryptic, desire-evoking and provocative in life.

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2.4 SUMMARY

- English poet-critic Samuel Taylor Coleridge was greatly influenced by German Metaphysics and the French Revolution.
- His interest in German literature changed him from a poet to a philosopher and it is because of this interest that he became an outstanding critic.
- Coleridge struggled with opium addiction throughout his life. His addiction and lack of self-confidence negatively impacted his writing.
- The literary career of Coleridge is roughly divided into four periods; the last phase witnessed a decline in his literary achievements.
- Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* established him as a critic due to his objective and unbiased outlook towards art.
- The ideas of freedom gained momentum in the late 18th century. For Coleridge, 'it was the freedom of entering the strange and mysterious zone of the supernatural.'
- A short visit to Germany piqued Coleridge's interest in German philosophers and German Literature. The German Literature looked at supernatural as an extension of the known world of nature.
- The French Revolution also influenced British poets like Wordsworth and Coleridge. They actively partook in the revolution in the early years. However, the revolution soon took a bloody turn and the duo distanced themselves from it.
- Coleridge's literary works includes an element of the supernatural, medievalism, imaginative flights and creates a dream-like world.
- *Kubla Khan*, written in 1797, is considered one of the best works of Coleridge. It was published first on the insistence of Lord Byron in 1816.
- The poem is divided into three parts. The first part describes the pleasure palace of Kubla Khan in thirty-six lines. The second part has five lines, while the third part has thirteen lines.
- The poet has also discussed an Abyssinian singing girl in the second part of the poem whom he had seen in a 'vision'.
- The final part of the poem paints a picture of an inspired poet who can radically change the world.
- Overall three pictures have been depicted in the poem i.e. Kubla Khan, Abyssinian Maid and the Visionary Poet. While the first part discussed the

complexities of life, the second ponders over the idea that art goes beyond life. The third part brings forward a picture of art that transforms life.

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2.5 KEY WORDS

- **Psychoanalysis:** It is a system of psychological theory that probes the unconscious elements in the mind by techniques such as dream interpretation. Coleridge believed that our perceptions and poetry originated from a place that we could not comprehend.
- **Medievalism:** It is a system of belief that is primarily inspired by the Middle Ages of Europe. It is characterised by a devotion to that period which can be found in art, literature, philosophy and other such areas. The medieval period was used as an inspiration in the Romantic Age.
- **Supernatural:** It is referred to as an event or force that is beyond the laws of science or understanding of nature.

2.6 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. State two features of Coleridge's literary works that differentiate him from other Romantic poets.
2. Write a short note on the impact of German philosophers on Coleridge.
3. What are Coleridge's contributions to the field of literary criticism?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Elaborate on the 'imaginative sensibility' of Coleridge in *Kubla Khan.*
2. Discuss the element of the supernatural in Coleridge's *Kubla Khan.*
3. Explain the impact of socio-political events on Coleridge's works.

2.7 FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 3 JOHN KEATS

Structure

3.0 Introduction
3.1 Objectives
3.2 Keats' *Ode on a Grecian Urn*
3.3 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
3.4 Summary
3.5 Key Words
3.6 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
3.7 Further Readings

3.0 INTRODUCTION

John Keats was one of the most renowned and beloved of the romantic poets of the second generation. As is characteristic of romantic poets to include sensual imagery in their poems, Keats made use of the same style. He incorporated a myriad of connotations and poetic devices to lay to his works, a sense of extreme emotionality with an emphasis on natural imagery, heightened spiritual experiences, imagination and the sublime. Keats' is accredited with the conception of ideas such as *negative capability* and the *ethereal.*

'Ode on a Grecian' Urn is one of his most celebrated poems that focuses on themes like the inevitability of death and the nature of beauty. There are two scenes which are focused upon, one is that of a number of villagers gathering for performing a ritual or sacrifice and the other is that of a lover and his pursuance of his beloved while ruminating over the fact that the their beauty is immortal but despite that, they lack the bliss of accomplishment of their love. This unit focuses on the aforementioned poem in addition to critical perspectives on the same.

3.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss John Keats' poem *Ode on a Grecian Urn*
- Analyze the opinion of prominent literary figures on the 'beauty-truth' debate

3.2 KEATS' *ODE ON A GRECIAN URN*

John Keats (1795 –1821) was one of the main figures of the second generation of Romantic poets along with Lord Byron and Percy Bysshe Shelley. Being not from a rich family, Keats' parents were unable to afford Eton or Harrow, so in the summer of 1803, he was sent to board at John Clarke's school in Enfield, close to

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his grandparents' house. Keats was registered as a medical student at Guy's Hospital (now part of King's College London) and began studying there in October 1815. But the medical profession increasingly encroached upon his writing time, and he became ambivalent towards his medical career. Although he continued his work and training at Guy's, Keats devoted more and more time to the study of literature, experimenting with verse forms, particularly the sonnet. In October, Clarke introduced Keats to the influential Leigh Hunt, a close friend of Byron and Shelley. Five months later came the publication of *Poems*, the first volume of Keats's verse. In spite of the bad reviews of *Poems*, Hunt published the essay *Three Young Poets* (Shelley, Keats, and Reynolds) and the sonnet *On First Looking into Chapman's Homer*. Having left his training at the hospital, suffering from a succession of colds, and unhappy with living in damp rooms in London, Keats moved with his brothers in the village of Hampstead in April 1817. In June 1818, Keats began a walking tour of Scotland, Ireland, and the Lake District with his friend Charles Armitage Brown. The winter of 1818–19, though a difficult period for the poet, marked the beginning of his *Annus Mirabilis* in which he wrote his most mature work. He composed five of his six great odes at Wentworth Place in April and May and, although it is debated in which order they were written, *Ode to Psyche* opened the published series. According to Brown, *Ode to a Nightingale* was composed under a plum tree in the garden and wrote, 'In the spring of 1819 a nightingale had built her nest near my house. Keats felt a tranquil and continual joy in her song; and one morning he took his chair from the breakfast-table to the grass-plot under a plum-tree, where he sat for two or three hours. When he came into the house, I perceived he had some scraps of paper in his hand, and these he was quietly thrusting behind the books. On inquiry, I found those scraps, four or five in number, contained his poetic feelings on the song of our nightingale.' *Ode to a Grecian Urn* and *Ode on Melancholy* were inspired by sonnet forms and probably written after *Ode to a Nightingale*. In 1819, Keats wrote *The Eve of St. Agnes*, *La Belle Dame sans Merci*, *Hyperion*, *Lamia* and *Otho.*

During the 1820s Keats displayed increasingly serious symptoms of tuberculosis, suffering two lung haemorrhages in the first few days of February. Hunt nursed him in London for much of the following summer. At the suggestion of his doctors, he agreed to move to Italy with his friend Joseph Severn. On 13 September, they left for Gravesend and four days later boarded the sailing brig Maria Crowther, where he made the final revisions of his famous sonnet *Bright Star*. The journey was a minor catastrophe: storms broke out followed by a dead calm that slowed the ship's progress. When they finally docked in Naples, the ship was held in quarantine for ten days due to a suspected outbreak of cholera in Britain. Keats reached Rome on 14 November, by which time any hope of a warmer climate that he sought had disappeared. The first months of 1821 was marked by a slow and steady decline into the final stage of tuberculosis. John Keats died in Rome on 23 February, 1821 and was buried in the Protestant Cemetery, Rome.

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Negative Capability from M. H. Abrams' Glossary of Literary Terms, Ninth Edition, Wadsworth Cengage Learning, Boston, 2009

> Poet John Keats introduced this term in a letter written in December 1817 to define a literary quality 'which Shakespeare possessed so enormously—I mean *Negative Capability*, that is, when man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.' Keats contrasted to this quality the writing of Coleridge, who 'would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude . . . from being incapable of remaining content with half knowledge,' and went on to express the general principle 'that with a great poet the sense of beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration.'

The elusive term has entered critical circulation and has accumulated a large body of commentary. When conjoined with observations in other letters by Keats, 'negative capability' can be taken (1) to characterize an impersonal, or objective, author who maintains *aesthetic distance*, as opposed to a subjective author who is personally involved with the characters and actions represented in a work of literature, and as opposed also to an author who uses a literary work to present and to make persuasive his or her personal beliefs; and (2) to suggest that, when embodied in a beautiful artistic form, the literary subject matter, concepts, and characters are not subject to the ordinary standards of evidence, truth, and morality, as we apply these standards in the course of our everyday experience.

Ode on a Grecian Urn: A Critical Appreciation

Ode to a Grecian Urn is divided into five stanzas of ten lines each, which contains the poet's discourse on a series of designs on a Grecian urn. The poem focuses on two scenes: one in which a lover eternally pursues a beloved without fulfilment and another of villagers about to perform a sacrifice. The final lines of the poem declare that 'beauty is truth, truth beauty that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know', and literary critics have debated whether they increase or diminish the overall beauty of the poem. Critics have focused on other aspects of the poem, including the role of the narrator, the inspirational qualities of real-world objects, and the paradoxical relationship between the poem's world and reality.

Ode to a Grecian Urn begins with the poet silencing the urn by describing it as the 'bride of quietness.' Therefore, instead of the urn speaking for itself, the poet speaks on behalf of the urn which allows him to speak about his own impressions on the urn. The poet addresses the urn by saying:

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness!
Thou foster-child of silence and slow time (lines 1–2)

The urn is a 'foster-child of silence and slow time' because it is created from stone which is not easily perishable and therefore almost immortal. But though it is immortal, it cannot speak for itself, therefore it is a foster child of silence. Even though it is silent, but the urn speaks a lot to the sensitive individual who has the

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power to fathom its meaning. It may be a 'foster child of silence' but at the same time it is also a 'sylvan historian.' It is a historian as it has a tale engraved upon it which tells a lot about the culture in which it is made and at the same time it also tells the history of the time it from which it has been has passed. The beauty of the urn itself proclaims the history of it. The poet says:

'Sylvan historian, who canst thus express
A flow'ry tale more sweetly than our rhyme:
What leaf-fring'd legend haunts about thy shape
Of deities or mortals, or of both,
In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?
What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?' (lines 3–10)

The poet can look at the beautiful engravings at the urn and be astonished by its sublimity, but he cannot understand what they mean hence, a series of questions come to his mind. He asks whether the images are divine or mortal. These are his thoughts as he sees the urn.

In the second stanza, the poet describes the melody in the urn's world:

'Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,
Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone.' (lines 11–14)

To a casual observer of the urn, there is nothing to be heard; but the poet can hear great music as he sees the urn – it is a kind of music that appeals to the mind and not to the sensual ears. It is nothing like the music that one hears in the outside world, it is music which is unheard but sweeter than all the 'heard melodies.' The beauty of the urn itself creates music in the poet's mind which is unmatched and therefore the poet urges the urn to carry on with the piping of the music so that he can enjoy each and every moment that he is there. It is music to the soul and the poet wants to enjoy that music forever. He wants to prolong the moment as much as possible as he tried to do when he was in love with 'easeful death' in *Ode to a Nightingale* as he was listening to the 'melodious plot' of nightingale's song.

The poet then looks at the image of the 'bold lover' who is forever young and whose beloved (replete with beauty and youth) will never fade with time (as it happens with mortals) but he will never be able to accomplish the bliss of the first kiss though he is very near to accomplish it ('though winning near the goal'). If the world of the urn is immortal, the bold lover, his beloved and beloved's beauty is immortal; then at the same time, the lover and the urn also lack something –the bliss of accomplishing.

'Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
Though winning near the goal – yet, do not grieve;

She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!' (lines 17–20)

Similarly in the third stanza, the poet begins by speaking to a tree, which will forever be green as it will hold its leaves forever and will never 'bid the Spring adieu.' Though the pipe will always play on, the lover and the beloved will forever be young and beautiful, the tree will always be green; but they will never be able to complete the life cycle. The poet says that the world of urn is:

'For ever panting, and forever young;
All breathing human passion far above,
That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloyed,
A burning forehead, and a parching tongue.' (lines 27–30)

The paradox of the world of urn is that it is living a living death. It is a moment where the images are made to stand still, they cannot move further. Similarly in Stanza four, the poet brings in a new image which also tells a similar story — the sacrifice of a virgin cow, an image that appeared in the Elgin Marbles, Claude Lorrain's *Sacrifice to Apollo*, and Raphael's *The Sacrifice at Lystra*.

'Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
To what green altar, O mysterious priest,
Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,
And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?
What little town by river or sea shore,
Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,
Is emptied of its folk, this pious morn?
And, little town, thy streets for evermore
Will silent be; and not a soul to tell
Why thou art desolate, can e'er return.' (Lines 31–40)

The scene in Stanza four is that of a sacrifice of a cow – there is a religiosity of the image as it is a religious procession; but underneath the religious imagery lies the cry of the cow ('heifer lowing at the skies') which suggests certain violence to be performed. It may be a beautiful scene of the procession; but underneath that beauty it also talks about the 'peaceful citadel' getting emptied of its people (folk) leading to a silence and desolateness of the town – similar to that of the silence of the urn. The fourth image that the poet presents about the urn is not such a joyous image as compared to the earlier ones. The people leaving the town are never to return as they are fixed in a moment and can never travel back to their home.

The poet then progresses to the final stanza of the poem where the poet reminds the readers and the urn that it is a piece of eternal artwork:

'O Attic shape! Fair attitude! with bred
Of marble men and maidens overwrought,
With forest branches and the trodden weed;
Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought
As doth eternity: Cold pastoral!' (Lines 41–45)

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The urn may be a piece of eternity – but as said by the poet earlier, it is a 'foster child of the silence' – it may be immortal but it lacks the warmth of life, the bliss of the first kiss, etc. therefore the poet terms it as a 'cold pastoral.' It is a pastoral world, but a pastoral world which lacks warmth. Its eternity may tease the poet to join the world of the urn to escape from the pains and sufferings of this world. Then the poet goes on to tell the urn:

'When old age shall this generation waste,
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou sayst,
"Beauty is truth, truth beauty," – that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know'. (Lines 46–50)

The last two lines of the poem created a debate over the years. The statement 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty' has been read in multifarious ways. It may be that:

- the poet is saying it to the urn
- the urn is saying it to the poet
- the poet saying it to the readers
- the urn saying it to the readers

'A thing of beauty is a joy forever', this Keatsian statement may make us feel that Keats considers Beauty to be the greatest truth and proclaims the same to readers. However one ought to be wary of considering this as the ultimate truth. Had this been Keats' motive, then the *Ode to a Grecian Urn* would have been the final statement to the Great Odes of 1819. Instead we see the poet moving on to two more odes, both progressively more introspective. In his *Ode to a Grecian Urn,* beauty, as it would seem is the only thing that the urn can implore the poet and readers to acknowledge. A rare beauty that is immutable and indestructible. One may even consider the possibility of irony embedded in the sentence where the poet mocks the urn for knowing only beauty as it knows not anything else. Reflecting further upon the 'coldness' of the urn, the poet suggests that the beauty of the beloved and the youth of the lover may never perish as it has been frozen in the urn.

The urn can be thought to be representative of art in general and poetry in particular. The poetic truth and the truth about reality are two different things – probably Keats is talking about the differences of these two truths through the *Ode to a Grecian Urn*. Art can concern itself only with beauty and can exist for its own sake; but in reality one cannot survive with beauty and beauty alone. There are other concerns that life has. Keats probably wanted to move far away from the other concerns and pains of that ideal world of beauty; but arrived at the conclusion that the world of art cannot sustain him forever and in world of eternal beauty, there is no life or any real warmth of existence. Keats is a person who believed in the beauty of life; for him 'scenery is fine, but human nature is finer.' Therefore instead of celebrating art through the Grecian urn, Keats chose to celebrate life.

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Some quotes from critics on Ode to a Grecian Urn *and 'beauty –truth' debate:*

Josiah Conder, in a September 1820 *Eclectic Review*: 'Mr Keats, seemingly, can think or write of scarcely anything else than the 'happy pieties' of Paganism. A Grecian urn throws him into an ecstasy: its 'silent form,' he says, 'doth tease us out of thought as doth Eternity,'—a very happy description of the bewildering effect which such subjects have at least had upon his own mind; and his fancy having thus got the better of his reason, we are the less surprised at the oracle which the Urn is made to utter:' Beauty is truth, truth beauty,'—that is all Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know. That is, all that Mr. Keats knows or cares to know. But till he knows much more than this, he will never write verses fit to live.' http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ode on a Grecian Urn - cite_note-45

George Gilfillan (1845): 'The finest of Keats' smaller pieces … In originality, Keats has seldom been surpassed. His works 'rise like an exhalation.' His language has been formed on a false system; but, ere he died, was clarifying itself from its more glaring faults, and becoming copious clear, and select. He seems to have been averse to all speculative thought, and his only creed, we fear, was expressed in the words— Beauty is truth,—truth beauty'

Robert Bridges: 'The thought as enounced in the first stanza is the supremacy of ideal art over Nature, because of its unchanging expression of perfect; and this is true and beautiful; but its amplification in the poem is unprogressive, monotonous, and scattered ... which gives an effect of poverty in spite of the beauty. The last stanza enters stumbling upon a pun, but its concluding lines are very fine, and make a sort of recovery with their forcible directness.'

Arthur Quiller-Couch: 'a vague observation – to anyone whom life has taught to face facts and define his terms, actually an *uneducated* conclusion, albeit most pardonable in one so young and ardent.'

I.A. Richards (1929):'On the one hand there are very many people who, if they read any poetry at all, try to take all its statements seriously – and find them silly ... This may seem an absurd mistake but, alas! It is none the less common. On the other hand there are those who succeed too well, who swallow 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty ...,' as the quintessence of an aesthetic philosophy, not as the expression of a certain blend of feelings, and proceed into a complete stalemate of muddle-mindedness as a result of their linguistic naivety.'

T. S. Eliot, 1929 "Dante" (responding to Richards):'I am at first inclined to agree ... But on re-reading the whole Ode, this line strikes me as a serious blemish on a beautiful poem, and the reason must be either that I fail to understand it, or that it is a statement which is untrue. And I suppose that Keats meant something by it, however remote his truth and his beauty may have been from these words in ordinary use. And I am sure that he would have repudiated any explanation of the line which called it a pseudo-statement ... The statement of Keats seems to me meaningless: or perhaps the fact that it is grammatically meaningless conceals another meaning from me.'

Cleanth Brooks, 1947: 'We shall not feel that the generalization, unqualified and to be taken literally, is meant to march out of its context to compete with the scientific and philosophical generalizations which dominate our world. 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty' has precisely the same status, and the same justification as Shakespeare's 'Ripeness is all.' It is a speech 'in character' and supported by a dramatic context. To conclude thus may seem to weight the principle of dramatic propriety with more than it can bear. This would not be fair to the complexity of the problem of truth in art nor fair to Keats's little parable. Granted; and yet the

principle of dramatic propriety may take us further than would first appear. Respect for it may at least insure our dealing with the problem of truth at the level on which it is really relevant to literature.'

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M. H. Abrams, 1957:'I entirely agree, then, with Professor Brooks in his explication of the *Ode*, that 'Beauty is truth' ... is to be considered as a speech 'in character' and 'dramatically appropriate' to the Urn. I am uneasy, however, about his final reference to 'the world-view ...' For the poem as a whole is equally an utterance by a dramatically presented speaker, and none of its statements is proffered for our endorsement as a philosophical generalization of unlimited scope. They are all, therefore, to be apprehended as histrionic elements which are 'in character' and 'dramatically appropriate,' for their inherent interest as stages in the evolution of an artistically ordered ... experience of a credible human being.'

Earl Wasserman, 1953:'The more we tug at the final lines of the ode, the more the noose of their meaning strangles our comprehension of the poem ... The aphorism is all the more beguiling because it appears near the end of the poem, for its apparently climactic position has generally led to the assumption that it is the abstract summation of the poem ... But the ode is not an abstract statement or an excursion into philosophy. It is a poem about things.'

F. W. Bateson, 1966: 'The *Ode to a Nightingale* had ended with the explicit admission that the 'fancy' is a 'cheat,' and the *Grecian Urn* concludes with a similar repudiation. But this time it is a positive instead of a negative conclusion. There is no escape from the 'woe' that 'shall this generation waste,' but the action of time can be confronted and seen in its proper proportions. To enable its readers to do this is the special function of poetry." Ronald Sharp followed in 1979 with a claim that the theme of "the relationship between life and art ... receives its most famous, and its most enigmatic and controversial, treatment" within the poem.'

Check Your Progress

1. Who introduced Keats to Leigh Hunt?
2. How does John Keats define *Negative Capability*?
3. In which year did Keats write *Hyperion*?
4. Why does Keats call the urn a 'sylvan historian'?
5. What is the paradox of the world of Urn?

3.3 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. In October 1815, John Clarke introduced Keats to the influential Leigh Hunt, a close friend of Byron and Shelley.
2. Poet John Keats introduced this term in a letter written in December 1817 to define a literary quality 'which Shakespeare possessed so enormously— I mean *Negative Capability*, that is, when man is capable of being in

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uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.'

3. Keats wrote in *Hyperion* in the year 1819.
4. Keats calls the urn a 'sylvan historian' as it has a tale engraved upon it which tells a lot about the culture in which it is made and at the same time it also tells the history of the time from which it has passed.
5. The paradox of the world of urn is that it is living a living death. It is a moment where the images are made to stand still, they cannot move further.

3.4 SUMMARY

- Keats was registered as a medical student at Guy's Hospital (now part of King's College London) and began studying there in October 1815.
- The winter of 1818–19, though a difficult period for the poet, marked the beginning of his *Annus Mirabilis* in which he wrote his most mature work. He composed five of his six great odes at Wentworth Place in April and May and, although it is debated in which order they were written, *Ode to Psyche* opened the published series.
- Keats contrasted to *Negative Capability* the writing of Coleridge, who 'would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude . . . from being incapable of remaining content with half knowledge,' and went on to express the general principle 'that with a great poet the sense of beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration.'
- The final lines of the poem Ode on a Grecian Urn declare that 'beauty is truth, truth beauty that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know', and literary critics have debated whether they increase or diminish the overall beauty of the poem.
- The poet can look at the beautiful engravings at the urn and be astonished by its sublimity, but he cannot understand what they mean hence, a series of questions come to his mind. He asks whether the images are divine or mortal.
- To a casual observer of the urn, there is nothing to be heard; but the poet can hear great music as he sees the urn – it is a kind of music that appeals to the mind and not to the sensual ears. It is nothing like the music that one hears in the outside world, it is music which is unheard but sweeter than all the 'heard melodies.'
- The scene in Stanza four of the *Ode on a Grecian Urn* is that of a sacrifice of a cow – there is a religiosity of the image as it is a religious procession; but underneath the religious imagery lies the cry of the cow ('heifer lowing at the skies') which suggests certain violence to be performed.

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- In his *Ode to a Grecian Urn,* beauty, as it would seem is the only thing that the urn can implore the poet and readers to acknowledge. A rare beauty that is immutable and indestructible.
- Art can concern itself only with beauty and can exist for its own sake; but in reality one cannot survive with beauty and beauty alone. There are other concerns that life has.
- T.S. Eliot on *Ode on a Grecian Urn*: 'I am at first inclined to agree ... But on re-reading the whole Ode, this line strikes me as a serious blemish on a beautiful poem, and the reason must be either that I fail to understand it, or that it is a statement which is untrue.
- Earl Wasserman's response to Ode on a Grecian Urn: The aphorism is all the more beguiling because it appears near the end of the poem, for its apparently climactic position has generally led to the assumption that it is the abstract summation of the poem ... But the ode is not an abstract statement or an excursion into philosophy. It is a poem about things.'

3.5 KEY WORDS

- **Negative Capability:** It is the capacity of the greatest writers (particularly Shakespeare) to pursue a vision of artistic beauty even when it leads them into intellectual confusion and uncertainty, as opposed to a preference for philosophical certainty over artistic beauty.
- **Paganism:** It refers to a religion other than one of the main world religions, specifically a non-Christian or pre-Christian religion. It is a religion that worships many gods, especially a religion that existed before the main world religions.

3.6 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. What are the two scenes on which *Ode on a Grecian Urn* focuses?
2. List the ways in which the statement 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty' has been read.
3. Write a short note on Cleanth Brooks' critique of *Ode on a Grecian Urn.*

Long-Answer Questions

1. Discuss the connotations of the term *Negative Capability* when conjoined with observations in other letters by Keats.
2. Explain why the urn is a 'foster-child of silence and slow time'.

3.7 FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 4 P.B. SHELLEY

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Structure

4.0 Introduction
4.1 Objectives
4.2 Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind*
4.3 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
4.4 Summary
4.5 Key Words
4.6 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
4.7 Further Readings

4.0 INTRODUCTION

Percy Bysshe Shelley, an eminent romantic poet born in 1792 in Horsham, England is widely known for his classic anthological works, prose fiction and a number of significant essays on topics ranging from politics to philosophy. He was a revolutionary who questioned the tyranny of the state and the corruption in society. Owing to his disapproving tone and radical nature, he had to face severe criticism in life.

Ode to the West Wind was written by Shelley in 1819. It is a poem that is symbolic of the poet's revolutionary zeal as it personifies wind as a preserver as well as a destroyer that is powerful and can move freely without barriers. The poet wishes that his verses will be as powerful and influential as the west wind in putting across his message of freedom and revolution that ought to spread far and wide. This unit provides an analysis of the poem as well as Shelley's writing style.

4.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss Shelley's poetic style
- Analyze Shelley's poem *Ode to the West Wind* and its critical appreciation

4.2 SHELLEY'S *ODE TO THE WEST WIND*

Like Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) was a great revolutionary, who championed the cause of liberty. He revolted against tyranny of the State, against corruption in morals and manners. His *Queen Mab* was an angry protest of an idealistic youth against a corrupt and coarse society. His *The Spirit of Solitude, The Revolt of Islam, Prometheus Unbound, Ode to Liberty, Mont Blank* were poems of revolutionary ideals which made passionate plea for the total freedom of

human will and ideal social order. Romantic poetry is predominantly known for nature, beauty, love, imagination, etc. Poets have hardly spoken about death and desperation. In such themes, Shelley stands out as a romantic poet. His strong disapproving voice, radicalism and revolting temperament made him one of the leading poets of his age. His close friends were John Keats and Lord Byron. It is also said that when he died, a pocket book of Keats's poetry was found in his pocket.

Introduction to Shelley's Poetry

P.B. Shelley was born in Sussex in 1792. His parents belonged to the class of nobility. As a child he was highly fanciful like William Blake. He was a sensitive boy who held self-respect above anything else. Shelley joined Eton College in 1804, where he was ridiculed and called 'Mad Shelley' by other boys. He was ill-treated as he revolted against the tyrannical system prevalent in the school. While at Oxford, he published his pamphlet *The Necessity of Atheism* because of which he was expelled from the university. First Shelley married Harriet, a school girl whose parents never agreed to this marriage. Even Shelley's own parents disinherited him for this. Later he eloped with Mary, who later wrote *Frankenstein*. Sadly, this elopement led to Harriet's well-known suicide.

Nature was obviously a primary source of inspiration for Shelley's poetry. In 1818, he left for Italy and never returned. The picturesque scenery of Rome and Pisa influenced *Prometheus Unbound* and *The Witch of Atlas*. His most famous short poems, *Ode to the West Wind* and *To a Skylark*, are based on actual experiences in Italy. Shelley's nature poetry is concerned with the more immediate descriptions and feelings produced by the poet's experiences with nature. Of major importance in this connection are *Alastor, Mont Blanc, The Sensitive Plant, Ode to the West Wind, To a Skylark* and several short poems. The concept of ideal beauty not only strongly influenced the form of Shelley's poetry, but also helped to constitute the theme of his work. The treatment may be narrative or reflective, but it always relies heavily on description.

Shelley's view of the landscape finds its two extremes in the ideals of the cave and the isle. The Platonic concept of the cave as the abode of thought and dream was one of Shelley's favourites. Thus, the mountain scenery is closely connected with his philosophic ideas. Descriptions like the following occur repeatedly in various poems, but with similar expressions:

'. . . wintry mountains, inaccessibly
Hemmed in with rifts and precipices gray.
And hanging crags, many a cove and bay,'

(The Witch of Atlas)

Apart from the description of a stationary scene, the wild, mountainous landscape may engage in dramatic effects. The poems *Alastor* and the *Spirit of Solitude* are an allegorical voyage of the mind. The varying description of the

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scenery is symbolic of the tragic changes wrought in the poet's soul. The poet is a master in the rendition of sound impressions. He contrasts the roar of the waterfall with the harmonious sound of the wind in the trees. He describes a small brook in three different aspects, two of which involve sound effects: '…..the rivulet

Wanton and wild, through many a green ravine
Beneath the forest flowed- Sometimes it fell
Among the moss with hollow harmony
Dark and profound Now on the polished stones*
It danced; like childhood laughing as it went:
Then through the plain in tranquil wanderings crept,
Reflecting every herb and drooping bud
That overhung its quietness…'

(Alastor)

Shelley's love for the sea is connected with his love for waterfalls and brooks. He usually prefers to see it stormy, powerful and majestic. Shelley's dream maidens are garmented in light. His fondness for water, which combines the effects of sound, motion and light, may also be the result of his view of a unified nature. In the poem *To a Skylark*, the water imagery is the underlying effect:

'From rainbow clouds there flow not
Drops so bright to see
As from thy presence showers a rain of melody,'

(To a Skylark)

Shelley compares the mind of the poet to a mighty river, which has its origin in the pure and spiritual heights of an eternal power. Mont Blanc expresses this idea symbolically in the river Arve, which originates in the remote and serene mountains of Mont Blanc. The introduction of the poem hints at its symbolical meaning:

'The everlasting universe of things
Flows through the mind, and rolls its rapid waves.
Now dark—now glittering—now reflecting gloom—
Now lending splendour, where from secret springs
The source of human thought its tribute brings
Of waters,….'

(Mont Blanc)

In the purest form of spiritual mysticism, the poet identifies himself with the spiritual powers of nature and loses himself in them. Shelley is probably the greatest lyricist.

Comparing Shelley with Wordsworth, critics say, 'Wordsworth found and Shelley lost himself in nature.' E. Blunden says of Shelley, 'Shelley did not take up every subject for verse in the solemn, neutral way which we scholiasts are liable to ascribe to him.'

The Poem: *Ode to the West Wind*

O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being,
Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,
Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,
Pestilence-stricken multitudes: O thou,
Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed
The wingèd seeds, where they lie cold and low,
Each like a corpse within its grave, until
Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow
Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth, and fill
(Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air)
With living hues and odours plain and hill:
Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere;
Destroyer and preserver; hear, oh, hear!

II

Thou on whose stream, mid the steep sky's commotion,
Loose clouds like earth's decaying leaves are shed,
Shook from the tangled boughs of Heaven and Ocean,
Angels of rain and lightning: there are spread
On the blue surface of thine aëry surge,
Like the bright hair uplifted from the head
Of some fierce Maenad, even from the dim verge
Of the horizon to the zenith's height,
The locks of the approaching storm. Thou dirge
Of the dying year, to which this closing night
Will be the dome of a vast sepulchre,
Vaulted with all thy congregated might
Of vapours, from whose solid atmosphere
Black rain, and fire, and hail will burst: oh, hear!

III

Thou who didst waken from his summer dreams
The blue Mediterranean, where he lay,
Lulled by the coil of his crystàlline streams,
Beside a pumice isle in Baiae's bay,
And saw in sleep old palaces and towers
Quivering within the wave's intenser day,
All overgrown with azure moss and flowers
So sweet, the sense faints picturing them! Thou

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For whose path the Atlantic's level powers
Cleave themselves into chasms, while far below
The sea-blooms and the oozy woods which wear
The sapless foliage of the ocean, know
Thy voice, and suddenly grow gray with fear,
And tremble and despoil themselves: oh, hear!

IV

If I were a dead leaf thou mightiest bear;
If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee;
A wave to pant beneath thy power, and share
The impulse of thy strength, only less free
Than thou, O uncontrollable! If even
I were as in my boyhood, and could be
The comrade of thy wanderings over Heaven,
As then, when to outstrip thy skiey speed
Scarce seemed a vision; I would ne'er have striven
As thus with thee in prayer in my sore need.
Oh, lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!
I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!
A heavy weight of hours has chained and bowed
One too like thee: tameless, and swift, and proud.

V

Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:
What if my leaves are falling like its own!
The tumult of thy mighty harmonies
Will take from both a deep, autumnal tone,
Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce,
My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!
Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!
And, by the incantation of this verse,
Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!
Be through my lips to unawakened earth
The trumpet of a prophecy! O, Wind,
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

Critical Appreciation of *Ode to the West Wind*

The West Wind is highly personified in this poem. The West Wind is presented as a destroyer as well as a preserver. The poem is both a personal and political

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document. It is an objectification of the poet's own revolutionary zeal. He derives strength from it and hopes that his own verses will be as powerful as the wind. The poet has a message of hope for all mankind. The west wind is free and can move anywhere it likes. It is symbolic of the poet's great love for freedom and revolution. The West Wind is very powerful and sweeps away everything that comes in its way. The poet prays for the same power he had while he was young. He wants to be tameless, proud and swift, even though the years are weighing on him. He has fallen on the thorny ground and requests the west wind to lift him like a wave, a leaf or a cloud. The message of the poem is very clear when the poet muses that if winter had arrived spring would inevitably follow soon in a matter of time. This shows the poet's unflinching faith in human progress, perfectibility and predictable optimism.

In the beginning of the poem, the poet says that the west wind carries some seeds away with it and scatters them everywhere. These seeds remain under the earth like dead bodies in the grave. They lie there during the whole of winter. Then, spring comes and rouses them by blowing its bugle. In other words, the seeds start sprouting and blooming in the spring season. The dreaming earth comes to life, and plants and flowers of different colours and sweet smell scatter over the fields and the hills.

Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth, and fill
(Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air)
With living hues and odours plain and hill:

The new sweet buds look like the flocks of sheep. The poet calls the wind a wild spirit. He says that it moves all over the place, destroying the old vegetation in order to create a new one.

Thou dirge………..
Of the dying year, to which this closing night
Will be the dome of a vast sepulchre,

In *Ode to the West Wind*, the poet highlights the effect of the west wind on the sky. The West Wind has scattered the clouds all over the sky. The West Wind is like a dirge, which is a funeral song, of the dying year. The passing night is like a dome of the big tomb, and in this dome, all dark clouds are gathered by the west wind. These dark clouds will bring forth rain, lightening and hails. In other words, rain, lightening and hail will burst from these dark clouds gathered under the dome. The poet wishes the same power for himself and requests the west wind to bestow it on him. The west wind lifts a wave, a leaf or a cloud and in the process provides energy and strength to them. He says that he has fallen on the thorns of life and is bleeding. He is passing through a very difficult time. There was a time when in his youth he was like the west wind, tameless and proud, but the burden of age and time have chained him and made him humble, bowed and helpless. Therefore, the poet makes a fervent appeal to the west wind to give its power to him.

Be thou, Spirit fierce,
My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!

Drive my dead thoughts over the universe

Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!

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The poet invokes the West Wind to give him some of its power in the above lines. He requests it to drive his dead thoughts over the universe as it does to the withered leaves. These withered leaves are helpful in bringing new life. Similarly, his dead thoughts will be helpful towards giving birth to new ideas. The power of the West Wind will hasten the birth of a new revolution and new world order.

The trumpet of a prophecy! O, Wind,

If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

In the end, the poet expresses great hope for mankind. The cycle of nature is such that if winter comes, spring will soon follow. With the arrival of spring, sorrows and sufferings will be replaced by joyous and happy days. Joyful times are bound to arrive soon and the poet is highly optimistic about the spring of bliss and happiness.

Check Your Progress

1. List some of Shelley's poems based on revolutionary ideals.
2. Name the pamphlet written by Shelley that led to his expulsion.
3. Who wrote *Frankenstein*?
4. Write a short note on Shelley's love for sea.
5. Why does Shelley call the wind a 'wild spirit'?

4.3 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Shelley's *The Spirit of Solitude, The Revolt of Islam, Prometheus Unbound, Ode to Liberty, Mont Blank* were poems of revolutionary ideals which made passionate plea for the total freedom of human will and ideal social order.
2. Shelley published a pamphlet titled The Necessity of Atheism, which led to his expulsion from the university.
3. P.B. Shelley's wife Mary Shelley wrote the *Frankenstein*.
4. Shelley's love for the sea is connected with his love for waterfalls and brooks. He usually prefers to see it stormy, powerful and majestic. Shelley's dream maidens are garmented in light. His fondness for water, which combines the effects of sound, motion and light, may also be the result of his view of a unified nature.
5. The poet calls the wind a wild spirit because it moves all over the place, destroying the old vegetation in order to create a new one.

4.4 SUMMARY

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- Like Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) was a great revolutionary, who championed the cause of liberty. He revolted against tyranny of the State, against corruption in morals and manners. His *Queen Mab* was an angry protest of an idealistic youth against a corrupt and coarse society.
- Shelley's nature poetry is concerned with the more immediate descriptions and feelings produced by the poet's experiences with nature. Of major importance in this connection are *Alastor, Mont Blanc, The Sensitive Plant, Ode to the West Wind, To a Skylark* and several short poems.
- While at Oxford, he published his pamphlet *The Necessity of Atheism* because of which he was expelled from the university.
- Shelley's view of the landscape finds its two extremes in the ideals of the cave and the isle. The Platonic concept of the cave as the abode of thought and dream was one of Shelley's favourites.
- Shelley compares the mind of the poet to a mighty river, which has its origin in the pure and spiritual heights of an eternal power. Mont Blanc expresses this idea symbolically in the river Arve, which originates in the remote and serene mountains of Mont Blanc.
- In the beginning of the poem *Ode to the West Wind*, the poet says that the west wind carries some seeds away with it and scatters them everywhere. These seeds remain under the earth like dead bodies in the grave. They lie there during the whole of winter. Then, spring comes and rouses them by blowing its bugle.
- The West Wind has scattered the clouds all over the sky. The West Wind is like a dirge, which is a funeral song, of the dying year. The passing night is like a dome of the big tomb, and in this dome, all dark clouds are gathered by the west wind.
- The poet invokes the West Wind to give him some of its power. He requests it to drive his dead thoughts over the universe as it does to the withered leaves. These withered leaves are helpful in bringing new life. Similarly, his dead thoughts will be helpful towards giving birth to new ideas.

4.5 KEY WORDS

- **Idealist:** It refers to a person who accepts the doctrines of philosophical idealism, as by representing things in an ideal form, or as they might or should be rather than as they are.
- **Allegory:** It is a story, poem, or picture that can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning, typically a moral or political one.

4.6 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

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Short-Answer Questions

1. What is Shelley's nature poetry concerned with?
2. Write a short note on the description of wild, mountainous landscape in the poems *Alastor* and *Spirit of Solitude* and its effect.
3. Write a short note on the effect of the west wind on the sky.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Discuss the importance of nature as a primary source of inspiration for Shelley.
2. Describe the nature of the west wind in the poem *Ode to the West Wind*.

4.7 FURTHER READINGS

Wilcox, Stewart C. 1950. *Imagery, Ideas, and Design in Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind'*. North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press.

Duffy, Edward. 1984. *Where Shelley Wrote and What He Wrote For: The Example of 'The Ode to the West Wind'*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press.

BLOCK - II

POETRY - II

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UNIT 5 ROBERT BROWNING

Structure

5.0 Introduction
5.1 Objectives
5.2 Browning's *My Last Duchess*
5.3 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
5.4 Summary
5.5 Key Words
5.6 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
5.7 Further Readings

5.0 INTRODUCTION

Robert Browning was born in 1812 in Camberwell, England. The early years of his career went by in obscurity but he received wide acclaim and recognition for his dramatic monologues, his epic poem *The Ring and the Book* and the children's poem *The Pied Piper.* His poems are noted for their social commentary, irony and dark humour.

My Last Duchess is undoubtedly the most noticeable and famous work of Browning. It was written in 1842 and lays emphasis on the position and treatment of women in the Victorian society wherein men concentrated all the power and women were considered to be beneath and inferior to men thus depriving them of any freedom to live life on their own terms. This unit provides an analysis of the aforesaid poem and dramatic monologue style.

5.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Analyze Robert Browning's poem *My Last Duchess*
- Discuss the characteristics of a Dramatic Monologue
- Evaluate Browning as a poet of Dramatic Monologue

5.2 BROWNING'S *MY LAST DUCHESS*

Robert Browning was born on 7 May 1812, in Camberwell, England. His mother was an accomplished pianist and a devout evangelical Christian. His father, who

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worked as a blank clerk, was also an artist, scholar, antiquarian, and collector of books and pictures. Browning's early career began promisingly, but was not a huge success. The long poem *Pauline* brought him to the attention of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and was followed by *Paracelsus*, which was praised by Wordsworth and Dickens, but in 1840 the difficult *Sordello*, which was seen as wilfully obscure, brought his poetry into disrepute. His reputation took more than a decade to recover. Today, Browning's critically most esteemed poems include the monologues *Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came, Fra Lippo Lippi, Andrea Del Sarto,* and *My Last Duchess.*

Browning published *Dramatis Personae*, with both first and second editions in the 1860s. He attained success only when he reached his 50s. *The Ring and the Book*, published in 1868-69 is often cited by critics as his most supreme work, whereas The *Pied Piper of Hamelin*, a children's poem was one of his biggest commercial successes. Despite the latter being not considered by the poet to be a work of major consequence, it was destined to become famous. However, Browning's name is primarily associated with the dramatic monologue. In a dramatic monologue, a character divulges many things about himself or herself, sometimes more than they intended. The characters expose themselves by talking to a listener from an utterly subjective point of view. Browning was reinstated in the good books of the mid-century critics of the twentieth century, after it was disparaged initially by the modernist critics of that time.

The Poem

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Fra Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
'Fra Pandolf' by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps
Fra Pandolf chanced to say 'Her mantle laps
Over my lady's wrist too much,' or "Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint

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Half-flush that dies along her throat": such stuff
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy. She had
A heart—how shall I say?—too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace—all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men,—good! but thanked
Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech—(which I have not)—to make your will
Quite clear to such an one, and say, "Just this
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark"—and if she let
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet
The company below, then. I repeat,
The Count your master's known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretence
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

Critical Appreciation of *My Last Duchess*

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Robert Browning is one of the famous poets of the nineteenth century (Victorian period). He is particularly well-known for one of his early monologues, *My Last Duchess*. *My Last Duchess* is a great example of dramatic dialogue, a poetic form used to narrate and dramatize Victorian concerns. *My Last Duchess*, a dramatic monologue written in 1842 by Robert Browning, is the first of two companion pieces originally released under the title *Italy and France*. It is written in twenty-eight rhyming couplets, with iambic pentameter dominating the poem throughout. The easy conversational flow of the poem is created by making the regular mid-line pauses or caesura, the dominant stops of the poem rather than end stops.

My Last Duchess was first published in the volume of poems called, *Dramatic Lyrics*, in 1842. It was republished in the *Dramatic Romances* of 1863. It is a dramatic monologue and Phelps regards it as one of the finest dramatic monologues not only of Browning, but in the whole range of English literature. The poem, *My Last Duchess,* is based on incidents in the life of Alfonso II, Duke of Ferrara in Italy. The Duke's first wife, Lucrezia, died in 1561 – after they had been married for three years. The background of the poem is interesting, but the text can be difficult to understand. The use of dramatic monologue works to separate the speaker from the poet (Browning). The speaker is the Duke. It was an important cultural center during the Renaissance. Whether the character of the Duke in the Monologue is based on some actual historical figure or not, there can be no denying the fact that in a monologue, the poet has captured the very spirit of Renaissance Italy, its intrigues, its sensuality, its greed, as well as its cultural and artistic activity.

The Duke has been widowed recently, and intends to marry a second time. The messenger of a powerful Count, who has his estate in the neighbourhood, comes to the Duke's palace to negotiate with him the marriage of the Count's daughter. The Duke takes him round his picture gallery and shows to him the portrait of his last Duchess. The portrait is lifelike and realistic, and the Duke, who is a great lover of the fine arts, is justly proud of it.

The Duke points out the portrait to the messenger and tells him that he alone uncovers the picture and nobody else is allowed to do so. At this point, the Duke notices an inquiring look in the eyes of the messenger and at once understands that he wants to know the cause of the deep, passionate look in the eyes of the Duchess, and proceeds to satisfy his curiosity. In response to the inquiring look of the messenger, the Duke tells him that the look in the eyes of the Duchess does not result from any sex-intrigue or guilty love. He did not give her any occasion to be unfaithful to him. Even the portrait on the wall was done not by an ordinary artist, but by a monk, and he was allowed only one day to do it. He did not allow the monk any longer than that and he did not want to provide them any occasion for intimacy. This shows that the Duke is a jealous tyrant and the poor Duchess could not have enjoyed any freedom of movement as the wife of such a man.

Continuing further with his explanation, the Duke tells the envoy that his last Duchess had a very childish and foolish nature. She was pleased with trifles; would thank others for even the slightest service they happened to render to her, and had no sense of dignity and decorum. For example, the faint blush of joy on her cheek and her neck was not caused by the presence of her husband alone. If the painter happened to mention that her cloak covered her wrist too much, or that paint could never hope to capture the light pink glow on her throat, she would like such chance remarks as compliments and blush with pleasure. She had a childish heart, and was pleased much too easily by such trifles as the gift of a branch laden with cherries, the beautiful sunset, or the mule presented to her by someone for her rides round the terrace. She would blush with pleasure at such trifles, just as much as she would blush at some costly ornament presented by him. She was the wife of a Duke who belonged to an ancient family, nine hundred year old, but she considered even this gift of his at par with the trifling services rendered to her by others. As a matter of fact, she had no discrimination, and no sense of dignity and decorum. She smiled at everybody without distinction; she thanked everybody in the same way. He had expected better sense from his wife. He did not correct her, for even to notice such frivolity would have meant loss of dignity, and he did not like to suffer this loss. Besides, she would have argued and discussed with him, instead of listening to his advice. Her habit of smiling continued to grow till it became intolerable to him. At last he gave orders, and 'Then all smiles stopped together'. What seems most outrageous of all to the speaker is that she showed others her appreciation for their kindness in such a way that seemed to him to belittle his greatest gift: his title.

'She thanked men - good! But thanked
Somehow - I know not how - as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody's gift' (ll. 31-34).

This statement, perhaps, reveals more about the speaker than any of his previous statements. It becomes clear that he felt the duchess to be indebted to him for the gift of his noble title, which seems, by his description of her, to be the only gift he had to offer.

We cannot say for certain how the smiling stopped. However, most probably, the poor, innocent Duchess was murdered at the command of her brutal and stony-hearted husband. The Duke then asks the messenger to come down to where the other guests of his are waiting. In passing, he tells the messenger that he would expect a rich dowry from his master, the Count, though, of course, he adds very cleverly, his primary concern is the daughter, and not the dowry. The Duke is not only hard-hearted and tyrannical but also greedy and cunning. He is a hypocrite of the first order. We decipher the Duke by what he says and how he says it. Through him, we also learn about his wife, the last Duchess. We interpret something of how their relationship stood, what his expectations were, how she responded, and the like.

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In short, we learn a great deal about his character by hearing how he thought and felt about her. The Duke is manipulative, filled with family pride and a feeling of ownership over even the memory of his deceased wife. The only redeeming thing about him is, his love of art. As they go down the stairs, he asks the messenger to have a good look at the bronze statue of Neptune, the sea-god. In this statue, the god is shown riding and controlling a sea-horse. It was done specially for him by the great sculptor, Claus of Innsbruck. It is the name of an imaginary artist invented to impress the messenger just as earlier he had invented the name of the painter, Fra Pandolf.

The poem reveals him as a proud, possessive, selfish man and a lover of the arts. He regarded his late wife as a mere object who existed only to please him and do his bidding. He likes the portrait of her (the subject of his monologue) because, unlike the duchess when she was alive, it reveals only her beauty and none of the 'annoying' qualities in her that irked or angered the duke. Moreover, he now has complete control of the portrait as a pretty art object that he can show to visitors. Several lines in the poem suggest that the duke had also treated his wife as a mere object. He only expected her to be beautiful to look at. But of course, the Duchess was human and she had faults. When the duke became annoyed by them and by her smiling face, he 'gave commands' that ended her smiling. In other words, he apparently ordered her to be killed. The word 'last' in the title suggests that the young woman in the portrait was not the Duke's first wife. One wonders whether his previous wife (or wives) met the same fate and whether his next duchess will also end up like his 'last duchess.' Thus, Robert Browning's poem, *My Last Duchess* illustrates the attitude towards women in the sixteenth century. The Duke, from an aristocratic family, expects his wife to behave in a certain way and when she does not, she pays the ultimate price. Women were expected to be happy doting over their husband and their family; any other outside interests were seen as inconveniences. The fact that the Duke can do away with his last duchess in such a nonchalant way, demonstrates how society views women. If the husband is displeased with his wife's behaviour, he can simply do away with her and have the next best through a portrait of her on the wall.

The monologue is an admirable piece of character study. It is a poem of fifty lines, but within its brief compass, the poet has rendered a vivid and moving description of both the Duke and the Duchess. The tyranny, pride, hard-heartedness, and dictatorial attitude of the Duke have been thrown into sharp relief by contrast with the genial, cheerful and good nature of the Duchess. Not only is this monologue an admirable piece of character study, but it is also the very epitome of the Italian Renaissance. The very spirit of the age has been captured in a short piece. The style of the monologue is dense and epigrammatic. The line, 'all smiles stopped together,' is a concentrated expression of a whole life's tragedy. However, despite its density and concentration, the poem is lucid and clear. It is entirely free from the usual faults of Browning. No doubt, there are a few parentheses, but they do not come in the way of understanding. The poem is written in heroic couplets, but

as the sense runs on from one line to another, the readers are hardly conscious of the rhyme.

Dramatic Monologue

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The dramatic monologue is a prominent type of Victorian poetry. It is considered as the most significant innovation of that particular period because we can say that it highlights the age. It has been widely used by an overwhelming range of poets, both male, from Alfred Tennyson to Algernon Swinburne, and female, such as Felicia Hemans to Augusta Webster. Its use continued throughout the twentieth century, influencing poets, both British and American, from T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound to Peter Porter and Richard Howard.

Dramatic monologue is a kind of poem in which a single fictional or historical character other than the poet, speaks to a silent 'audience' of one or more persons. Such poems reveal not the poet's own thoughts but the mind of the impersonated character, whose personality is revealed unwittingly; this distinguishes a dramatic monologue from a lyric, while the implied presence of an auditor distinguishes it from a soliloquy. Major examples of this form in English are Tennyson's *Ulysses (1842*), Browning's *Fra Lippo Lippi (1855*) and T.S. Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock (1917*). These poems have a theatrical quality. In dramatic monologues, the speaker is talking to someone who is a mute listener, but the speaker expresses his point of view, psychology. The speaker may or may not be telling the truth, but he is trying to convince someone of something. Sometimes what the speaker doesn't *say* is just as revealing and interesting as what he or she does say in the poem. The speaker reveals his/her character and motives to the reader, while remaining unaware that he is doing so. Robert Browning is the master of dramatic monologues, as showcased by *My Last Duchess, The Last Ride Together, The Lost Mistress*. The lover is very upset as all is over between him and his beloved in *The Lost Mistress*; he begins,

All's over, then: does truth sound bitter
As one at first believes?
Hark, 'tis the sparrows' good-night twitter
About your cottage eaves!

There is always an abrupt and dramatic opening in such monologues and the use colloquial expressions are made by the speaker. The lover is talking to his beloved at her rejection of his love by her. The reader can also visualize the setting before his eyes; this is the hallmark of a dramatic monologue. The purpose of the monologue is not so much to make a statement about its declared subject matter, but to develop the character of the speaker. Browning's monologues typically consist of an uninterrupted narrative spoken by a single character to a specific audience. The speaker is not the poet himself, but rather a character (a persona) created by the poet. Browning creates a living, breathing human being, with a complex personal history and view of the world within a few, seemingly accidental, lines.

NOTES

As a rule, each dramatic monologue should display:

- A speaker
- An identified audience
- An occasion
- Interplay between speaker and audience, which takes place in the present
- Revelation of character

Of course, there are clear disadvantages of the dramatic monologue as well. The very fact that the narrative perspective is so limited can make the poems appear frivolous and unnecessarily light-hearted given the dark subject matter (murder and/or madness, prostitution and poverty). Browning is especially known for dramatic monologues, which certainly hide the intentions of the author just as much as they hide the intentions of the speakers. For example in *My Last Duchess* we ask ourselves if Browning is making a serious statement about the treatment of women in Victorian Italy.

Browning as a poet of Dramatic Monologue

Browning's genius was dramatic as well as metaphysical. He was gifted with an almost unlimited power of imagination which was always exerted upon real things, visible or invisible, that is to say on everything that a human being can think or feel. He is realistic because he is never a visionary. His brilliance was essentially dramatic. His dramatic bent of mind is seen in his characterization, and in the unfolding of strong dramatic situations. He also considered drama as the highest form of expression. He, therefore, took to writing plays for the public stage in right earnest and produced at least eight plays in a period of eight years. Browning is a cheerful optimist; optimism is at the very core of his teaching and his view of human life. Contrary to the views of some critics, his optimism is not 'blind' for he does not shut his eyes to the suffering and evil that is in life. It is not a cheap optimism as it is founded on the realities of life. The famous lines in *Pippa Passes*,

God is in his heaven,
All is right with the world.

He spoke the strongest word of faith in an age of doubt and pessimism. A drama is essentially a representation of action, but in Browning's play, the action is entirely internal. His real interest lay in soul study, in introspection and psychological analysis, and so his plays were stage-failures. His dramatic skill, as well as his skill in painting 'interior landscapes,' could be exercised to advantage in the dramatic monologue, and it was of this poetic form that he became the supreme exponent. The dramatic monologue was used by Browning with amazing skill and success. As Hugh Walker points out, 'Browning did not invent the dramatic monologue, but he made it specially his own, and no one else has ever put such rich and varied material into it.'

The salient features of the dramatic monologue are best brought out through a comparison and contrast both with the drama proper and the soliloquy. The dramatic monologue differs widely from the drama in its purpose and its method. In the drama, the action is external; in the monologue the action is entirely internal. The thoughts and emotions of the individual character are the actors, and his soul is the stage. Dramatic monologue develops character not through outward action and conflict as in the drama, but through the clash of motives in the soul of the speaker, and with this end in view a moment of crisis is chosen, a moment when his personality is most active.

The monologue is to be distinguished from the soliloquy. For one thing, the monologue is much longer than the soliloquy, thus allowing the poet fuller scope for character portrayal and the analysis of motives and emotions. The soliloquy is a sort of private debate, 'a dialogue of the mind with itself', a speech of a person to himself when he is all alone, whereas a dramatic monologue implies the presence of some other character or characters, to whom it is addressed, and who listen to it, though they may not take part in it. This imparts to the monologue a conversational tone. *My Last Duchess* is a dramatic monologue, a poem with a character who presents an account centering on a particular topic. This character speaks all the words in the poem. During his discourse, the speaker intentionally or unintentionally reveals information about one or more of the following: his personality, his state of mind, his attitude toward his topic, and his response or reaction to developments relating to his topic. The main focus of a dramatic monologue is this personal information, not the topic which the speaker happens to be discussing. The word monologue is derived from a Greek word meaning to speak alone.

In each monologue, the speaker is placed in the most momentous or critical situation of his life, and the monologue embodies his reactions to this situation. Unlike a dramatist, Browning does not begin slowly with an action leading to the crisis, rather he plunges headlong into the crisis. For this reason, his monologues have an abrupt, but very arresting opening, and at the same time, what has gone before is suggested cleverly or brought out through retrospective meditation and reflection. *My Last Duchess* opens with a reference to a picture of the dead Duchess with clear indications that it is being shown to someone. This abrupt beginning is followed by self-introspection on the part of the speaker, and the whole gamut of his moods, emotions, reflections and meditations is given. The speaker's thoughts range freely over the past and the future, and so there is no logical and chronological development. The past and the future are focused in the present, and the unity is emotional rather than logical. The language of the monologues conforms closely to the thought-processes of the speaker concerned. It is the language of informal talk.

In his analysis of particular mental states, in his probing into the minds and hearts of the central characters of his monologues, in short, in his passion for psychoanalysis, Browning anticipates, to a very great extent, the modern 'stream

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of consciousness' technique. Like the modern impressionists, Browning, too, focuses the past and the future in the present; instead of giving us the orderly sequential development of thought, he ranges at will over vast stretches of time. His business is to render the soul or psyche of his protagonists, and so he follows the same technique as the modern impressionists.

In *My Last Duchess*, the speaker is the Duke, a perfect model of a nobleman of Renaissance Italy. His former wife, the last Duchess is dead. A neighbouring Count has sent to him an emissary offering his daughter's hand in marriage. It is important for the Duke to send the emissary back, suitably impressed, so that the Count receives a favourable report about him. He brings the emissary to his art gallery, draws the curtain in front of the portrait of his late wife and speaks the words that form the monologue. It is a critical moment indeed since the realization of his aspirations depends entirely on the impression he creates on the visitor.

As suggested above, the subject of *My Last Duchess* is the character delineation of the Duchess, but ironically, the speaker reveals more of himself than about the Duchess. The latter emerges as an extremely amiable woman, who is polite, courteous, easily pleased, generous at heart and utterly incorruptible. The Duke, on the other hand, is a heartless snob, devoid of all human feelings. The first few words uttered by him suggest his possessive and suspicious nature. He treated her no better than a prize possession. When she was alive, her courteous nature incensed him, but now that she is dead, and has been reduced to an art piece, he takes pride in possessing her and jealously guards the portrait from public gaze. His suspicious nature is revealed by the choice of the artist engaged by him to draw the portrait. Even though the artist was a priest by profession and sure to conduct himself in an upright manner, he kept sitting near the Duchess till the portrait was finished. His exaggerated pride in his nine hundred year old family looks ridiculous to the modern reader though his contemporaries might have found nothing wrong in it. He fails to understand how the Duchess could show the same courtesy to other people that she showed to him. He regrets that she smiled at whatever she saw and that her eyes fell everywhere.

This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together.

There was no boorishness in her character. However, this lovable trait instead of eliciting gratitude from him, infuriated him. A time came when he could no longer put up with the total absence of snobbishness in her, and he decided to get rid of her. This fact is hinted at in words shrouded with mystery 'and not explicitly stated'. Besides these qualities, the monologue also reveals his felicity with language, his avariciousness suggested by his expectations of a large dowry and his bullying nature symbolized by the statue of Neptune taming sea waves placed at the entrance of the art gallery.

The heroes of Browning's monologues are mostly self-deceived. The Duke, too, is no exception. He misinterprets vanity as justifiable self-pride. To him, showing courtesy to others deserves reprimand, and not admiration. His self-deception lies in the fact that the more he speaks disparagingly of his wife, the more she rises in the reader's esteem, and the more he tries to justify his own behaviour, the lower he sinks in the reader's opinion. Nevertheless, in certain respects, he understands himself rather too clearly. He knows what he expects and sends the right signals. He is a great patron of art and his art gallery could be the pride of any nobleman in the country. He is a non-sense man and would tolerate no opposition from his would-be wife. He expects a bountiful dowry and his expectations must be fulfilled. His cleverly worded speech fully succeeds in sending the right signals to the Count:

I repeat,
The Count your master's known munificence
is ample warrant that no just pretence
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as l avowed
At starting, is my object.

Much of the success of Browning's monologues depends upon the listener in the poem, for it provides us with a perspective to judge the poem. This is particularly true of a monologue like *My Last Duchess.* The Duke would not have appeared to be such an inhuman monster if he had not haunted his habit of bullying his former wife and mentioned getting her murdered, to a person who has brought another marriage proposal. It is true that the emissary is a contemporary figure and did not possess the eye of literature that the reader possesses. Still, since his mister chose to send him on such an important mission, he must have been a man of sufficient intelligence and could not have been blind to the Duke's snobbishness or his utter lack of human emotions.

According to critic Robert Langbaum, the dramatic element in a dramatic monologue is introduced by the disequilibrium between sympathy and judgment. The speaker delivers his speech in a very persuasive tone and puts across his views very effectively. Browning's monologues are logically structured and the speaker's tone is throughout argumentative. As long as he is able to engage us, he is also able to win our support for his point of view or our sympathy. However, the moment we detach ourselves and assume neutrality, internal contradictions of his argument start appearing and we judge him also. He demands our admiration as a lover of art, and we do admire him for that but we also wholeheartedly condemn the debasement of that love when we find that though he takes pride in the portrait of the Duchess, he despised her when she was alive. He says that he is proud of his lineage, but that lineage cannot justify his vanity. It is the tension between such polarities in the poem that makes it a successful dramatic monologue.

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Check Your Progress

1. Name some of the most esteemed dramatic monologues written by Robert Browning.
2. What is the easy conversational flow of *My Last Duchess* created by?
3. List the major examples of dramatic monologue in English.
4. Why do Browning's mono logues have an arresting opening?

5.3 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Browning's critically most esteemed poems include the monologues *Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came, Fra Lippo Lippi, Andrea Del Sarto,* and *My Last Duchess.*
2. The easy conversational flow of the poem is created by making the regular mid-line pauses or caesura, the dominant stops of the poem rather than end stops.
3. Major examples of this form in English are Tennyson's *Ulysses (1842*), Browning's *Fra Lippo Lippi (1855*) and T.S. Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock (1917*).
4. Unlike a dramatist, Browning does not begin slowly with an action leading to the crisis, rather he plunges headlong into the crisis. For this reason, his monologues have an abrupt, but very arresting opening.

5.4 SUMMARY

- The long poem *Pauline* brought Browning to the attention of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, and was followed by *Paracelsus*, which was praised by Wordsworth and Dickens, but in 1840 the difficult *Sordello*, which was seen as wilfully obscure, brought his poetry into disrepute.
- *The Ring and the Book*, published in 1868-69 is often cited by critics as his most supreme work, whereas The *Pied Piper of Hamelin*, a children's poem was one of his biggest commercial successes.
- *My Last Duchess* was first published in the volume of poems called, *Dramatic Lyrics*, in 1842. It was republished in the *Dramatic Romances* of 1863.
- The poem, *My Last Duchess,* is based on incidents in the life of Alfonso II, Duke of Ferrara in Italy. The Duke's first wife, Lucrezia, died in 1561 – after they had been married for three years.

- The Duke is manipulative, filled with family pride and a feeling of ownership over even the memory of his deceased wife. The only redeeming thing about him is, his love of art.
- The Duke likes the portrait of her (the subject of his monologue) because, unlike the duchess when she was alive, it reveals only her beauty and none of the 'annoying' qualities in her that irked or angered him.
- The tyranny, pride, hard-heartedness, and dictatorial attitude of the Duke have been thrown into sharp relief by contrast with the genial, cheerful and good nature of the Duchess. Not only is this monologue an admirable piece of character study, but it is also the very epitome of the Italian Renaissance.
- The style of the monologue is dense and epigrammatic. The line, 'all smiles stopped together,' is a concentrated expression of a whole life's tragedy.
- Dramatic Monologue has been widely used by an overwhelming range of poets, both male, from Alfred Tennyson to Algernon Swinburne, and female, such as Felicia Hemans to Augusta Webster. Its use continued throughout the twentieth century, influencing poets, both British and American, from T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound to Peter Porter and Richard Howard.
- As a rule, each dramatic monologue should display:
  - o A speaker
  - o An identified audience
  - o An occasion
  - o Interplay between speaker and audience, which takes place in the present
  - o Revelation of character
- In his analysis of particular mental states, in his probing into the minds and hearts of the central characters of his monologues, in short, in his passion for psychoanalysis, Browning anticipates, to a very great extent, the modern 'stream of consciousness' technique.
- The heroes of Browning's monologues are mostly self-deceived. The Duke, too, is no exception. He misinterprets vanity as justifiable self-pride. To him, showing courtesy to others deserves reprimand, and not admiration.
- According to critic Robert Langbaum, the dramatic element in a dramatic monologue is introduced by the disequilibrium between sympathy and judgment.

5.5 KEY WORDS

- **Dramatic Monologue:** It is a kind of poem in which a single fictional or historical character other than the poet, speaks to a silent 'audience' of one or more persons. Such poems reveal not the poet's own thoughts but the mind of the impersonated character, whose personality is revealed unwittingly.

- **Metaphysical Poetry:** It is a highly intellectualized poetry marked by bold and ingenious conceits, incongruous imagery, complexity and subtlety of thought, frequent use of paradox, and often by deliberate harshness or rigidity of expression.

5.6 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. What does a character divulge in a dramatic monologue?
2. Write a short note on the nature of the Duke.
3. How does *My Last Duchess* illustrate the attitude towards women in the sixteenth century?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Summarize the contents of the poem *My Last Duchess.*
2. Discuss the disadvantages of a dramatic monologue.

5.7 FURTHER READINGS

Woolford, John and Daniel Karlin. 1996. *Robert Browning*. United Kingdom: Routledge.

Markus, Julia. 1995. *The Marriage of Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning.* New York: Knopf

UNIT 6 DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI

NOTES

Structure

6.0 Introduction
6.1 Objectives
6.2 Rossetti's *The Blessed Damozel*
6.3 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
6.4 Summary
6.5 Key Words
6.6 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
6.7 Further Readings

6.0 INTRODUCTION

Dante Gabriel Rossetti was born in London in May 1828. His poetry is characterized by medieval revivalism, mysticism and vivid imagery. He was the founder of the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood, a group of artists who aimed to represent the simplicity and purity of the medieval period.

The Blessed Damozel is one of the best-known poems by Rossetti and was first published in 1850 in the journal, *The Germ.* The poem explores the theme of eternal love and hope as regards the reunion of two lovers despite being separated by the death of one. They yearn to be somehow reunited even though they exist in separate realms altogether. This unit provides an analysis and interpretation of the poem.

6.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss Dante Gabriel Rossetti's poem *The Blessed Damozel*
- Analyze the interpretations of the poem

6.2 ROSSETTI'S *THE BLESSED DAMOZEL*

The blessed damozel leaned out
From the gold bar of Heaven;
Her eyes were deeper than the depth
Of waters stilled at even;
She had three lilies in her hand,
And the stars in her hair were seven.

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Her robe, ungirt from clasp to hem,
No wrought flowers did adorn,
But a white rose of Mary's gift,
For service meetly worn;
Her hair that lay along her back
Was yellow like ripe corn.
Herseemed she scarce had been a day
One of God's choristers;
The wonder was not yet quite gone
From that still look of hers;
Albeit, to them she left, her day
Had counted as ten years.
(To one, it is ten years of years.
. . . Yet now, and in this place,
Surely she leaned o'er me — her hair
Fell all about my face. . . .
Nothing: the autumn-fall of leaves.
The whole year sets apace.)
It was the rampart of God's house
That she was standing on;
By God built over the sheer depth
The which is Space begun;
So high, that looking downward thence
She scarce could see the sun.
It lies in Heaven, across the flood
Of ether, as a bridge.
Beneath, the tides of day and night
With flame and darkness ridge
The void, as low as where this earth
Spins like a fretful midge.
Around her, lovers, newly met
'Mid deathless love's acclaims,
Spoke evermore among themselves
Their heart-remembered names;
And the souls mounting up to God
Went by her like thin flames.
And still she bowed herself and stooped
Out of the circling charm;

Until her bosom must have made
The bar she leaned on warm,
And the lilies lay as if asleep
Along her bended arm.
From the fixed place of Heaven she saw
Time like a pulse shake fierce
Through all the worlds. Her gaze still strove
Within the gulf to pierce
Its path; and now she spoke as when
The stars sang in their spheres.
The sun was gone now; the curled moon
Was like a little feather
Fluttering far down the gulf; and now
She spoke through the still weather.
Her voice was like the voice of the stars
Had when they sang together.
(Ah sweet! Even now, in that bird's song,
Strove not her accents there,
Fain to be hearkened? When those bells
Possessed the mid-day air,
Strove not her steps to reach my side
Down all the echoing stair?)
'I wish that he were come to me,
For he will come,' she said.
Lord, Lord, has he not pray'd?
Are not two prayers a perfect strength?
And shall I feel afraid?
'When round his head the aureole clings,
And he is clothed in white,
I'll take his hand and go with him
To the deep wells of light;
As unto a stream we will step down,
And bathe there in God's sight.
'We two will stand beside that shrine,
Occult, withheld, untrod,
Whose lamps are stirred continually
With prayer sent up to God;
And see our old prayers, granted, melt

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Each like a little cloud.
'We two will lie i' the shadow of
That living mystic tree
Within whose secret growth the Dove
Is sometimes felt to be,
While every leaf that His plumes touch
Saith His Name audibly.
'And I myself will teach to him,
I myself, lying so,
The songs I sing here; which his voice
Shall pause in, hushed and slow,
And find some knowledge at each pause,
Or some new thing to know.'
(Alas! We two, we two, thou say'st!
Yea, one wast thou with me
That once of old. But shall God lift
To endless unity
Was but its love for thee?)
'We two,' she said, 'will seek the groves
Where the lady Mary is,
With her five handmaidens, whose names
Are five sweet symphonies,
Cecily, Gertrude, Magdalen,
Margaret and Rosalys.
'Circlewise sit they, with bound locks
And foreheads garlanded;
Into the fine cloth white like flame
Weaving the golden thread,
To fashion the birth-robes for them
Who are just born, being dead.
'He shall fear, haply, and be dumb:
Then will I lay my cheek
To his, and tell about our love,
Not once abashed or weak:
And the dear Mother will approve
My pride, and let me speak.
'Herself shall bring us, hand in hand,
To him round whom all souls

Kneel, the clear-ranged unnumbered heads
Bowed with their aureoles:
And angels meeting us shall sing
To their citherns and citoles.
'There will I ask of Christ the Lord
Thus much for him and me: —
Only to live as once on earth
With Love, — only to be,
As then awhile, forever now
Together, I and he.'
She gazed and listened and then said,
Less sad of speech than mild, —
'All this is when he comes.' She ceased.
The light thrilled towards her, fill'd
With angels in strong level flight.
Her eyes prayed, and she smil'd.
(I saw her smile.) But soon their path
Was vague in distant spheres:
And then she cast her arms along
The golden barriers,
And laid her face between her hands,
And wept. (I heard her tears.)

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The Blessed Damozel (1850) is a beautiful romantic poem by the leading Pre-Raphaelite poet Dante Gabriel Rossetti. It is dedicated to his beloved, and later his wife, called Elizabeth Siddal. It is a dramatic poem consisting of twenty-four six-lined stanzas. Rossetti was a renowned and accomplished painter of the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood, a group chiefly of painters, musicians and poets who revived the theory of art which is boundless and natural. The main theme of the poem is a maiden who is innocent and pure. She is annihilated from this existence and her lover mourns her loss. The love between them is not separated though she is no more a part of earthly existence. And the hope lives on that one day they will unite in heaven. The Damozel, which means a young unmarried woman, wishes to enter the paradise, but she would cherish this wish fulfillment only when her lover is allowed to accompany her.

The first version of the poem which was done in 1847 was published in the Pre-Raphaelite journal named 'The Germ' in 1850. Its chief inspirations are both mythological and modern. It is often referred that *The Blessed Damozel* is inspired by Edgar Allen Poe's poem, *The Raven* which depicts a man who laments the death of his beloved Lenore. Its another source is the great Italian poet Dante Allighieri's famous poem *Divine Comedy* (1555) where his beloved Beatrice

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accompanies him from Purgatory to Heaven in a passage which is imaginary covering the stages of afterlife. Rossetti himself conveyed to his biographer T. H. Caine that *The Blessed Damozel* is conceived as a sequel to *The Raven* and explained— 'I saw that Poe had done the utmost that it was possible to do with the grief of a lover on earth, and so [I] determined to reverse the conditions, and give utterance to the yearning of the loved one in heaven.'

The Blessed Damozel is full of charm and picturesque beauty. It excels in word-pictures. The second, fourth and the sixth lines in every stanza rhyme the same: 'Heaven,' 'even' and 'seven' (1st stanza); 'adorn,' 'worn' and 'corn' (2nd stanza); 'choristers,' 'hers' and 'years' (3rd stanza), and likewise. Lines which have definite force are written in iambic tetrametre consisting of eight syllables. As per the principles of his group, Rossetti made it a very simple lyric in a dreamy atmosphere relating emotions of a virgin who dies in near past. She stands at the entrance of the heaven yearning for the union of her lover who is mourning at her separation. Rossetti has presented the amalgamation of spiritual and earthly images with grandeur here.

The poem describes the true love of an innocent and chaste girl. The structure is divided into the narrator's voice, the voice of the blessed Damozel and that of her lover's. The blessed Damozel is in heaven where she eagerly expects her lover to join her. In a dramatic manner and tone the poem begins where we hear of the beauty and qualities of this deserving girl. Then, she speaks about her wishes and pleads for her case in front of God. At last, the poem ends on the fact that he is alone on Earth and she is crying alone there in heaven to be with him. The speech of the Damozel is full of self-assertion. She is confident of winning God's heart and is sure that her prayers have worked wonders in paradise. She is also confident that they will be united forever from now-onwards. However, all ends on mere conjectures as in reality they are in separate spheres and their paths are 'indistinct.' It shows that they are made to wait for the decision of eternity. Rossetti's description of Heaven and other spheres are noteworthy as he shows distinct barrier between God's world and the world inhabited by humans. However, there are images which suggest that the Damozel is unhappy in the paradise too. Her wishes are unfulfilled and she longs to be one with her lamenting young lover.

Interpretation

Stanza- 1

The blessed Damozel was leaning over the golden banister of the Heaven where she had gone. She had very deep eyes like still water in which things on the bottom of the water surface can be seen. She was holding three lilies in her hand and seven stars were studded in her hair. The three lilies defined her purity and her closeness to the Trinity. The seven stars were symbols of mythological Pleiades. In Greek mythology, the seven daughters of Atlas and Pleione who attended the

goddess of virginity Artemis signify that the seven stars. They are — Alcyone, Celaeno, Electra, Maia, Merope, Sterope and Taygete. They turned stars after they died. Here, Rossetti's ideal of beauty is presented as an essence of purity, elegance, virgin charm and piety. As the title indicates, the poem is about a girl who possesses all the beauty and virtuousness that is required. She was deemed attractive and chaste on Earth. Even after her death, she continues to be the same in heaven.

Stanza-2

She was wearing a loose robe; a cloak or gown that hangs from her shoulders to her feet. There were no flowers embossed or embroidered on that dress. However, there was a single white rose fixed upon her attire which is bestowed by Virgin Mary as a gift for her chastity. Her hair sloped down over her nape and the back. Her hair was long and golden brown in colour. In short, she was beautiful in her simplicity and purity. No worldly charm adorned her. Whatever she had as an accomplishment for her beauty was a white rose gifted by Mother Mary which she received because of her good service to heaven.

Stanza- 3

She looked like someone new to this celestial abode; scarcely a day old here in heaven. She seemed bewildered and amazed in this new home. Her countenance mirrored the wonder that she felt being a part of this new place. There was poise in her looks. However, those on Earth whom she left behind on earth were deeply feeling her loss. To them, it seemed as though ten years have elapsed since she died. The poet draws a comparison between the heaven and Earth, wherein he describes the attractions of the former. He further stresses the fact that the maiden is not attracted by the appeals she receives in the heaven. From beginning to end, she remained distracted.

Stanza- 4

In this stanza, Rossetti introduces the hero of the poem. He says that to her lover it is as though many decades have passed since he beheld her the last time. However, he still felt that she was around and her tresses covered his face in hanging curls. He felt that she was leaning over him and her hair was shadowing his face. He sensed its softness and fragrance. Sad though, but she was not there! It was nothing but the sound of the falling of autumn leaves around him. Here, the poet has presented the reverie of the lover. Out of his reverie, he sees the dry and desolate autumn around and the year passes fast as usual. This stanza is in parentheses and there is first person speaker instead of the early third person narrator here. Like this, wherever Rossetti has mentioned her lover, he has used brackets to show his state or dialogues. In addition, the entire poem is described by a third person or an observer.

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Stanza- 5

The blessed Damozel is standing on the rampart built around the seat of God in heaven. She is trying to peep out of its circumference to see the other worlds. Around it the entire space which is encircling, is too full of depth to see anything. Heaven is placed above all other celestial bodies and there is a wide gap of height and length from heaven to the other worlds. Its height prevents her to see the Sun also when she looks down. There is a vast and unfathomable vacuum between heaven and the rest of space. She is making her best effort to view the Sun from where she is standing, but it is not clearly visible to her. In defining the spheres, Rossetti symbolically describes — how Earth and earthly beings, the things and spatial bodies that surround the Earth are prudently set apart from the concept of God and His world.

Stanza- 6

God's rampart lies in heaven. However, between heaven and the universe there was a flood of ether which was like a bridge for joining them. The rampart fell between the void in empty space and the inner part of heaven. Below this rampart, the flames of day and night rose and went down like the ebb and flow of ocean tides. Their reflection covered the ridge which was the space or void. In its deepest part, we have Earth which spins around its axis like a troubled insect. Rossetti has knowingly stressed on the fact that our planet is a symbol of unhappiness. He has put heaven as its contrast: the ultimate joy. There things are timeless and perfect.

Stanza- 7

Around Rossetti's blessed Damozel, lovers and newly arrived souls surrounded in a throng. There was hubbub circling her now. They were new here and were discussing with each other the stunning beauty of heaven. They were talking, laughing and enjoying. The separated souls were meeting each other too. They were rewarded for their faithfulness in purity of love towards their counterparts by God. That is why they met here. Their love deserved immortality. They were greeting each other in joy. Many other souls passed by her like mounting thin flames as they reached God one by one. But Rossetti's maiden is distracted and not noticing what is happening around her. She did not look at these new faces nor tried to mix with them. She was waiting for someone.

Stanza- 8

However, to her, it did neither charm nor matter. She still looked as a muse detached from what was happening around and stooped to see something beyond this din where she stood confused and hooked up. She was a little disconcerted too. She leaned out from that barricade to look down so much that the half of her upper part was hanging out. Her delicate bosoms were touching the bar on which she was leaning to peep down. Due to the contact of her bosoms, the bars were receiving bodily warmth. To say, the warmth of her heaving heart was touching the

bar on which she was leaning to look down. She was so distracted and lost that the lilies lay down as though in slumber over her beautiful arms. She was trying to search something in the blank space down the rampart. Perhaps, she was yearning to have a glance of the Earth which was set too deep in that void.

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Stanza- 9

Rossetti calls heaven the 'fix'd place' from where she saw Time which scattered fear in all the spheres of the world. Time was the master ruling every sphere of all the worlds except Heaven where God dwelt. Heaven was quiet and still. Time did not move there. Her gaze was fixed towards the Earth through the wide gap of space of this universe. At last, she uttered when the stars began to appear. It was as though the stars were producing music in different spheres.

Stanza- 10

The time is the arrival of evening when the Sun has already set. The crescent Moon appeared dimly in sight like a curled feather which goes down gradually driven by the wind. It was fixed on the lower end of the horizon. The crescent Moon was touching the edge of the sky fast as though a fluttering feather in the vast void. However, at this hour, when she spoke the weather became silent. The wind was not blowing and nothing stirred around when she spoke. Here, the music produced by her voice is compared with the music produced by the stars which they sang together. It is an allusion to Pythagoras, the great Greek philosopher and mathematician, according to whom there is mathematical harmony in the movement of the spatial bodies and it is similar to that of the harmony of musical notes. So, the voice of the Damozel was so lilting and harmonious that it sounded similar to the music produced by the stars when they sang together.

Stanza- 11

Once again the narrative describes her lover's thoughts about his dead beloved here. Within the parentheses his thoughts are expressed. He imagines that he is hearing her voice in a bird's song. When the church bells rang during the mid-day, she slowly descended to him crossing all the imaginary stairs of heaven. He was in the state of dilemma whether he was really hearing her voice in the bird's music, or was it a dream? Whether she was not approaching his side in the mid-day when the bells rang in the air far away? Both his reveries are marked by the note of interrogation which shows that he was trying to console his soul by her remembrances. In reality, he had lost her. Also, Rossetti tries to strike the note of telepathy here. Whenever she is described deeply yearning to meet her lover, the man feels her presence on Earth, or hears her.

Stanza- 12

The Damozel speaks in this stanza. She wished that her lover should have been permitted to be with her in the heaven. The vigorous tone used by Rossetti ensures the readers that he (the lover) will come. She addressed God and asked the divine

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authority if she had not prayed perfectly on Earth? And he too, had not done the same like her? She and he had always performed their mortal duties with purity and faith in the Almighty. Again she said if those two prayers with deep earnestness were not enough to move God's sentiments towards them? Should she fear that she had been amiss somewhere and for that sake she was being punished being separated from her lover like this? The stanza is in inverted commas which has the dialogue of the Blessed Damozel. She was confident that her human deeds along with her lover's had all the capacity of purity to unite them here in heaven. Thus, she was waiting eagerly for him. It was one day past now. Her patience rebelled within her nerves now. So, by the evening she started requesting God that her prayers and pious role on Earth must be rewarded. God must forgive them and bless them with their union forever.

Stanza- 13

The damozel continues with her speech or monologue. When around his head the halo of piety would shine and he would be clothed in a white hanging dress, she will hold his hand and walk with him towards the bright light visible from the place where she was standing now. The place, though seemed close to her in sight, but those few steps to that bright abode of God looked like immeasurable wells which were difficult to cross. She will travel across this sphere and enter that bright and lighted realm with her lover when he reaches heaven. She was expecting that he will come to paradise soon as she came there. Both of them will be rewarded suitably by God as deserving servants for their goodness, righteousness, faithfulness and spirituality. When they will step across those deep wells of overflowing bright light, it would be as though they have crossed through a stream, and then having been purified by those lights, they will stand in front of God. They will then be admitted to the territory of Lord Christ. In other words, after journeying across several of the eternal realms, they will be bathed by the auspicious sight of God.

Stanza- 14

Both of them will stand in front of the Almighty whose radiance brightens the whole world. They will also see that shrine which was occult, mysterious, quiet, reserved, and beyond anyone's touch. The lamps of that sacred shrine were stirred continuously by the prayers sent to heaven by sincere hearts from the other worlds around. She and her lover would witness how their own prayers were also granted, accepted and dissolved in it like little swinging clouds which were rolling in the atmosphere. She gave a thorough explanation how their prayers reached the holiest of the shrines and were accepted by God. A kind of assurance is accompanying her spirit that he is sure to arrive where she is now. We can see hope accompanying her as she explains about his coming and the incidents which are going to happen, or tests they are likely to clear before they are accepted by the Almighty.

Stanza- 15

Describing further their journey through various domains of heaven, she said that both of them would lie under the shadow of that divine tree which was the Tree of Life in the paradise where the Holy Spirit dwelt in the shape of a dove. Sometimes he descended from that sacred tree and every tree chanted this name aloud.

Stanza- 16

While lying beside her lover she would teach him the songs which she sang here. This implied that she would share her experiences and blessings which she received in Heaven prior to his arrival. It may also suggest that she spent many lone hours in the paradise waiting for her lover. Others were enjoying the state of bliss and union with different souls, but she kept herself aloof from all the pleasures which were there for her to avail. This shows she possessed immense self-control and she could not be misled anywhere howsoever temptations spilled over the ambience. She would share her experience with him and he would also do the same. They were away from each other and had much to share. In this exchange of personal experiences, his voice would halt, slow down and hush to gain knowledge at every pause. Every such pause would add new knowledge to his voice. Both of them would gain from each-others' experiences. That would add to the experience that they would receive while lying under the Holy Tree of Life in heaven.

Stanza- 17

In the present stanza, we have parentheses which connect to the lover's thoughts. He was rather too happy and content to think that she spoke for their union to God. Yes, one good and pure soul was here who was with him. This one was his own part once upon a time. However, he was in a state of confusion whether God will grant their unity again which would be endless? Will the Almighty be so kind to him too? Will he be able to enjoy her love there too? The young man is unsure if he would also attend the same prosperity that his beloved has now been availing being a part of God's world. There is a sort of lament in his tone here.

Stanza- 18

It appeared as if he was hearing her and she was replying to him from the paradise. The voice was so distinctly audible. She said in continuation that both of them will go to the sacred orchard where Virgin Mary lived with her five handmaidens called Cecily, Gertrude, Magdalen, Margaret and Rosalys. Their names were five sounds of music. In the chants of the girl, we see boldness and surety of achievement. But the man is in the state of confusion and loss. It may be the effect of the two different backgrounds where they exist now. She is in heaven and he is on Earth. This is the world of mortals and pain, whereas that is the world of pleasure, fixity and assurance.

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Stanza- 19

These handmaidens sat in a circle with their hair tied and forehead encircled with beautiful garlands. They weaved a fine white cloth with the golden flame like thread for those who had just been born there in heaven having ended their life on Earth. That holy cloth was meant for those who stepped into paradise as new members. These holy angels weaved fine white robes for those who were dead on Earth and entered the eternal realm. The colour white symbolizes purity and truth.

Stanza- 20

She being an old entrant here was paving way for her lover. By the intense tone of her voice, it can be understood that she felt superior to her lover in piety and goodness. Also, by her authenticity in teaching her lover and raising questions to God, it is made clear by the poet that she was a cleansed soul who knew her values and wanted her lover to follow her. In this stanza, she also added that he might grow tung-tied in fear and bewildered seeing all these happenings in paradise that she has seen by then. To calm his agitation, she would put her cheek over his and remind him of their pure love which had always held their head high in pride and respect. She was sure the loving and benign Virgin Mary who is the mother of all would recognize her good qualities, approve her pride or self-respect and allow her to speak and place her request.

Stanza- 21

Mother Mary will hold their hands and guide her to the abode where the God of Heaven dwelt— where all souls knelt down in reverence to Lord God of Heaven. Countless heads were seen down and in rows one after another. They were all bowing down and all of them had halos around their heads. These angels would celebrate their arrival by singing and playing their citherns and citoles in joy. The Damozel felt that her arrival to the house of God will be a great reckoning which will be ceremonized by music and dance. She feels that her good deeds will surely result into the best rewards when she would reach God.

Stanza- 22

In front of Jesus Christ, the ruler of Heaven, she would plead for their union forever. She would beg Him to grant her the felicity of love that she enjoyed with him on Earth. She would request God to allow her togetherness with him as she had that bliss on Earth once upon a time. She would pray for union with her lover and would also entreat to grant an ageless union. Nothing should separate them from each other in future after being one in paradise. Here, in this stanza, the element of drama is on climax. The demonstration of feelings, angels singing and the kingdom of God are all explained with a touch of melodrama.

Stanza- 23

After her requests and implorations in front of God, she stared deeply and listened to what came from Him as judgement. Then she spoke in a tone which was polite and slightly sad. It will all occur only when her lover will reach there. Uttering this, she became silent. The glow which lighted her beautiful face then became thrilled with gaiety. It felt like those powerful angels which floated in the air. The atmosphere was filled with angels and holy bliss. Her eyes prayed and she smiled.

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Stanza- 24

In the parentheses the young man is described again. In his imagination, he saw her smile. But soon after that their path became obscure and was set in different spheres. It is sure that she was there in heaven and he on Earth. She spread her hands to call him out of those golden banisters. Then hiding her face in her hands, she cried. In the parentheses again, her lover is mentioned who heard her in tears. The poem ends on this dramatic climax. Rossetti has not made the end obvious by clearing the dramatic tension. Rather, he has left it unsaid. The Damozel is in heaven and the man on Earth. Both of them look discontent. By the decision of God, which is undisclosed, it seems that they are yet to wait for their union. This strict decision has thrown them into a hapless situation. They are troubled and very sad.

Critical Appreciation

In the poem, *The Blessed Damozel*, the reader identifies the expression of a well-known and ancient theme of the longing of a lover to be one with his beloved from whom he has been isolated and separated. The poet has edged this desire in the mind of the lover as a wish-fulfilling dream. The sensitivity of the poem lies in the ironic conflict between the earthly desire of both the lovers to become physically intimate and the belief that the heaven is a sacred place where disembodied souls get joy, comfort and happiness in the presence of the Almighty. The poem's religious context emphasizes this irony.

In different parts of the poem, the physical dimension of the beloved in heaven is revealed unintentionally. Line 46 of the poem signifies that her bosom 'warms' the bar of the heaven, while in line 75, she imagines taking her lover's hand. She also imagines lying together with her lover in the shadow of the spiritual tree (line 85 and 86). In line 116, we see her dreaming again, laying her cheek against his, and finally, living in heaven 'as once on earth' (line 129).

However, in the earthly sense, these images are of physical intimacy. The poem implies the standards of medieval theology completely, according to which the beloved should be envisaging the joy of God. She should insist her lover to lay his grief aside and remember her as one who now enjoys the eternal life with God—the real reward of life.

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The poem also uses Christian imagery strongly, which is derived from Dante and other medieval Italian poets. In this context, it, therefore, does not support the sensuous desires of the lover. As much as the poet tried to imitate the ascetic spiritual idealization of Dante, his own sensuousness prevented him from achieving it.

The beloved, now in heaven, is yearning for her lover on earth passionately. She moves from a vision of their reunion, to hope of everlasting unity, and finally to doubt and despair. The emptiness between Earth and heaven is enormous. The separation of the lovers is emphasized here. The traditional Christian pacifiers about being in heaven hold no comfort for the grieving beloved, for without the lover, the heaven is like a hell for her.

Thomas H. Brown

According to literary critic Cecil Y. Lang, 'Pre-Raphaelitism strives, impossibly, to accept and reject [romantic supernaturalism] simultaneously: matter and spirit are not quite different and not quite identical, they are "the same and not the same". Pre-Raphaelite fantasy affirms the dichotomy, Pre-Raphaelite particularity repudiates it.' Literary critic Thomas H. Brown asserts that it is this very dichotomy between realism and fantasy, between naturalism and supernaturalism, which is both asserted and denied in *The Blessed Damozel*. In this particular poem, Brown believes that Rossetti seeks to negate the dichotomy by envisioning a reality in which natural and supernatural phenomena fuse. Critic Paul Lauter has pointed out that the key to understanding this poem lies in the nature of the narration, but whereas Lauter emphasizes the importance of the 'I' narrator in the poem, Brown suggests that of even greater significance is the fact that there are three distinct voices or speakers in the poem.

According to Brown, 'First, there is an omniscient narrator who describes the damozel and who is empowered to observe and relate the actions and feelings of both the lady and her lover. The first two stanzas, for example, portray a still-life within the framework of the poem itself. They reveal a detailed and naturalistic verbal portraiture of a supernatural phenomenon, a blessed lady leaning out of heaven; these stanzas are almost entirely descriptive. The third stanza, although still descriptive, begins to move towards a reflective interpretation of the scene. But the relatively static picture and mood enveloped in the first three stanzas is suddenly shattered by the different voice and action implied in the fourth:

To one, it is ten years of years.
...Yet now, and in this place,
Surely she leaned o'er me- her hair
Fell all about my face....
Nothing: the autumn fall of leaves.
The whole year sets apace.'

Brown further says, '*The Blessed Damozel* is a quest poem in which the lover probes multiple levels of his consciousness in an attempt to discover the reality of a spiritual-supernatural existence. He does not (as no one can) envision

the lady in the formless state of pure spirit, but in all her physical attributes. The particularity of physical detail throughout the poem becomes a means for him to conceptualize the existence of a non-physical, spiritual sphere. Traditional religious belief in the spiritual world by virtue of faith alone is noticeably absent in the poem despite the abundance of Christian imagery.'

Jerome J. McGann correctly points out that 'Rossetti has recast traditional Christian imagery into something quite different and that he has attempted to reinvest it with a new meaning. But whether Rossetti is relying upon the inherited tradition which lies behind the religious symbolism (which is unlikely), or whether he is attempting to revitalize a tired tradition, the effect of his using the imagery at all seems to remain the same. The religious imagery is invoked by the lover to help him discover or affirm the possibility of any kind of reunion with his lady, whether this reunion be spiritual, physical, or both. The lover, uncertain of the real existence of his lady's 'heaven', uses the religious imagery just as he uses the naturalistic imagery- as an invocation; it is an attempt to discover a reality wherein he can be re-united with his lady.'

Brown also stresses the fact that 'the dominant mood throughout the poem is one of a placid longing for union, but death has denied the possibility of physical union. The lover is asking, however, if death has also denied the possibility of a spiritual union. He is seeking a spiritual reality in which he and his lady may be reunited, but he questions whether elevation to an eternal spiritual existence will be possible solely through the love of a finite being. It would appear that in *The Blessed Damozel*, Rossetti is attempting to recapture poetically the transcendent experience felt in transitory moments of 'vision'. It is a vision in which the natural and the supernatural, the physical and the spiritual, have been harmoniously reintegrated.'

Brown concludes by saying that 'the ethereal mood evoked by the counter-playing of the three voices within one consciousness and by the juxtaposition of supernatural with naturalistic imagery is of central importance to the poem, for it is essentially in the mood evoked by the poem that we are invited to share the lover's (or the poet's) moments of vision. Rossetti is certainly not the only nineteenth-century poet to struggle with the problem of finding the right imagery to capture and hold the moment of poetic vision; it is Rossetti's technique which sets him apart.'

Check Your Progress

1. To whom is the poem The *Blessed Damozel* dedicated?
2. Name the pre-Raphaelite journal in which the poem The Blessed *Damozel* first appeared?
3. Which poem is *The Blessed Damozel* inspired by?
4. What is the structure of the poem divided in?
5. What does the comparison of the Damozel's voice with music produced by the stars allude to?

6.3 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

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1. D.G. Rossetti dedicated The *Blessed Damozel* to his beloved Elizabeth Siddal.
2. The *Blessed Damozel* first appeared in pre-Raphaelite journal 'The Germ'
3. The Blessed Damozel' is inspired by Edgar Allen Poe's poem, 'The Raven' which depicts a man who laments the death of his beloved Lenore.
4. The structure is divided into the narrator's voice, the voice of the blessed Damozel and that of her lover's.
5. It is an allusion to Pythagoras, the great Greek philosopher and mathematician, according to whom, there is mathematical harmony in the movement of the spatial bodies and it is similar to that of the harmony of musical notes.

6.4 SUMMARY

- *The Blessed Damozel* (1850) is a beautiful romantic poem by the leading Pre-Raphaelite poet Dante Gabriel Rossetti. It is dedicated to the love of his beloved, and later his wife, called Elizabeth Siddal.
- The first version of the poem which was done in 1847 published in the Pre-Raphaelite journal named 'The Germ' in 1850. Its chief inspirations are both mythological and modern.
- The second, fourth and the sixth lines in every stanza rhyme the same: 'Heaven,' 'even' and 'seven' (1st stanza); 'adorn,' 'worn' and 'corn' (2nd stanza); 'choristers,' 'hers' and 'years' (3rd stanza), and likewise. Lines which have definite force are written in iambic tetrametre consisting of eight syllables.
- The poet draws a comparison between the heaven and Earth, wherein he describes the attractions of the former. He further stresses the fact that the maiden is not attracted by the appeals she receives in the heaven. From beginning to end, she remained distracted.
- The blessed *Damozel* is standing on the rampart built around the seat of God in heaven. She is trying to peep out of its circumference to see the other worlds.
- Around Rossetti's blessed *Damozel*, lovers and newly arrived souls surrounded in a throng. The separated souls were meeting each other too. They were rewarded for their faithfulness in purity of love towards their counterparts by God. That is why they met here. Their love deserved immortality.

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- Both the *Damozel* and her lover will be rewarded suitably by God as deserving servants for their goodness, righteousness, faithfulness and spirituality.
- Both of them will stand in front of the Almighty whose radiance brightens the whole world. They will also see that shrine which was occult, mysterious, quiet, reserved, and beyond anyone's touch. The lamps of that sacred shrine were stirred continuously by the prayers sent to heaven by sincere hearts from the other worlds around.
- While lying beside her lover she would teach him the songs which she sang here. This implied that she would share her experiences and blessings which she received in Heaven prior to his arrival.
- These handmaidens sat in a circle with their hair tied and forehead encircled with beautiful garlands. They weaved a fine white cloth with the golden flame like thread for those who had just been born there in heaven having ended their life on Earth.
- The Damozel felt that her arrival to the house of God will be a great reckoning which will be ceremonized by music and dance. She feels that her good deeds will surely result into the best rewards when she would reach God.
- The poem ends on this dramatic climax. Rossetti has not made the end obvious by clearing the dramatic tension. Rather, he has left it unsaid. The Damozel is in heaven and the man on Earth. Both of them look discontented.
- The poem implies the standards of medieval theology completely, according to which the beloved should be envisaging the joy of God.
- The third stanza, although still descriptive, begins to move towards a reflective interpretation of the scene. But the relatively static picture and mood enveloped in the first three stanzas is suddenly shattered by the different voice and action implied in the fourth.
- Jerome J. McGann correctly points out that 'Rossetti has recast traditional Christian imagery into something quite different and that he has attempted to reinvest it with a new meaning.
- It would appear that in *The Blessed Damozel*, Rossetti is attempting to recapture poetically the transcendent experience felt in transitory moments of 'vision'. It is a vision in which the natural and the supernatural, the physical and the spiritual, have been harmoniously reintegrated.'

6.5 KEY WORDS

- **Pre-Raphaelite:** It refers to a member of a group of English 19th-century artists, including Holman Hunt, Millais, and D. G. Rossetti, who consciously sought to emulate the simplicity and sincerity of the work of Italian artists from before the time of Raphael.

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- **Naturalism:** It is a literary movement beginning in the late nineteenth century, similar to literary realism in its rejection of romanticism, but distinct in its embrace of determinism, detachment, scientific objectivism, and social commentary.

6.6 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. What is the main theme of the poem *The Blessed Damozel*?
2. What do the seven stars studded in the Damozel's hair symbolize?
3. What does the Damozel imply when she says that lying beside her lover, she would teach him the songs which she sang in paradise?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Analyze stanza 4 of the poem.
2. Elaborate upon the critical appreciation of *The Blessed Damozel*.

6.7 FURTHER READINGS

Doughty, Oswald. 1949. *A Victorian Romantic: Dante Gabriel Rossetti.* London: Yale University Press.

Untermeyer, Louis. 1942. *A Treasury of Great Poems: English and American.* New York: Simon and Schuster.

UNIT 7 ALFRED TENNYSON

NOTES

Structure

7.0 Introduction
7.1 Objectives
7.2 Tennyson's *Ulysses*
7.3 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
7.4 Summary
7.5 Key Words
7.6 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
7.7 Further Readings

7.0 INTRODUCTION

Alfred Tennyson was born in 1806 in Lincolnshire, England. He was the poet laureate during a major period of Queen Victoria's reign. His poetry is characterized for its potent visual imagery and medievalism. *Ulysses* is one of Tennyson's highly celebrated poems written in blank verse in 1833 that portrays the protagonist's dissatisfaction with the sedentary and unadventurous life of his fellow countrymen, their preoccupation with the mundane and unexciting activities of daily life. He longs for adventure and a final voyage to bring about a sense of fulfilment to his now uneventful life. This unit focuses on the nuances and interpretation of the aforesaid poem.

7.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss Tennyson's early life and writing style
- Analyze the interpretation of the poem *Ulysses*

7.2 TENNYSON'S *ULYSSES*

Tennyson was born on 6 August, 1809 in Somersby, Lincolnshire in England. Since childhood, he suffered a keen sense of 'want of money' and lifelong fear of mental disease- epilepsy. In 1827, he took admission in Trinity College, Cambridge. In 1829, he became a part of the Apostolic and became a part of undergraduate club to discuss major philosophical issues of the day. The members of the club were famous thinkers like Arthur Henry Hallam, James Spedding, Edward Lushington and Richard Monckton Milnes. Although Tennyson's relationship with Arthur lasted four years but it was an intense friendship. Hallam was engaged to Alfred Tennyson's sister, Emile Tennyson. But in 1833, Hallam died and Tennyson

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produced his best poetry in memory of Hallam - *In Memoriam A.H.H.* (1849), *Ulysses* (1833), *Tithonus* (1842) and *The Passing of Arthur* (1859). Tennyson was quite sensitive and got hurt easily by criticism. For nine years, he did not write just because he received criticism in a quarterly review. In 1850, he was honoured with Poet Laureate. He was the most popular poet of Victorian era. He dedicated *Idylls of the King* to Prince Albert in his memory. Queen Victoria offered him the title of the 'Lord'. In his last years, he suffered extreme short sightedness and faced difficulties in reading and writing, and died on 6 October 1892 at the age of eighty-three.

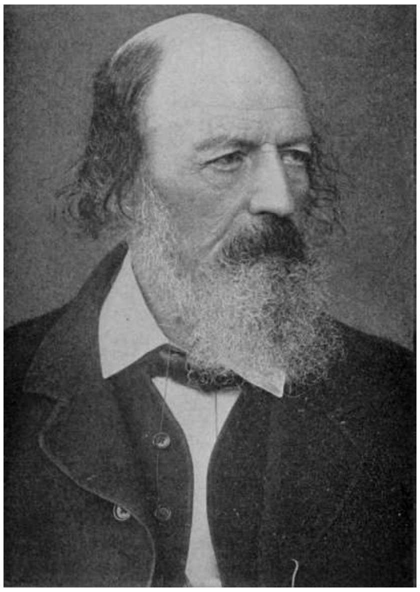


Fig. 7.1 *Alfred Lord Tennyson*

The Victorian poets, like the romantic poets, were adventurous in stanza forms in the eighteenth century. Tennyson liked to use fairly elaborate stanzas in which he could swing his lines with the mood. Tennyson sometimes copied Keats' heraldic use of colour, but generally his use of colour images was simply for the mood or atmosphere. The opening of Part IV of *The Lady of Shalott* (published in poems of 1833) is a good example. His turning of Marloy's stern story of Arthur's death into the muted melancholy of *Morte D'Arthur* is technical achievement of a high order. The heroic theme of *Ulysses*, one of Tennyson's most controlled and perfectly wrought dramatic monologues, which presents the voice of the aged Ulysses planning a final voyage, is similarly presented in a context of musical sadness. Like so many of his time, Tennyson was a warrier. He worried about God and Nature and man; about modern science and its effect on belief; about Darwin and the significance of his theory of evolution; and about the meaning of life. The death of his close friend, Arthur Henry Hallam in 1833, added an abiding sense of personal loss to his basic worries and the grief and the worries came together over the years to produce slowly the series of linked lyrics he called *In Memoriam* (1850).

Ulysses

It little profits that an idle king,
By this still hearth, among these barren crags,
Match'd with an aged wife, I mete and dole
Unequal laws unto a savage race,
That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me.
I cannot rest from travel; I will drink
Life to the lees. All times I have enjoy'd
Greatly, have suffer'd greatly, both with those
That loved me, and alone; on shore, and when
Thro' scudding drifts the rainy Hyades
Vext the dim sea. I am become a name;
For always roaming with a hungry heart
Much have I seen and known,— cities of men
And manners, climates, councils, governments,
Myself not least, but honor'd of them all,—
And drunk delight of battle with my peers,
Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.
I am a part of all that I have met;
Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'
Gleams that untravell'd world whose margin fades
For ever and for ever when I move.
How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!
As tho' to breathe were life! Life piled on life
Were all too little, and of one to me
Little remains; but every hour is saved
From that eternal silence, something more,
A bringer of new things; and vile it were
For some three suns to store and hoard myself,
And this gray spirit yearning in desire
To follow knowledge like a sinking star,
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.

NOTES

Interpretation

Ulysses, the legendary Greek hero was the king of Ithaca, who, after the siege of Troy, set sail for home. On his way home, he was subjected to many storms and obstacles because of the wrath of the sea god (Poseidon). He was forced to

wander for another ten years before he reached Ithaca, his wife Penelope and son Telemachus. But a sedentary life was not what he wanted and desired to travel again to 'follow virtue and knowledge' (Dante). In this poem, Ulysses is about to set sail on a final voyage from which he will never return.

Tennyson wrote this poem in a single day on 20 October, three weeks after he heard the news of Hallam's death in 1833. Tennyson said that the poem 'was written under the sense of loss and that all had gone by, but that still life must be fought out to the end'. This is Tennyson's best poem in which there seems to be a balance between melancholy on one hand and a sense of living life actively on the other.

Having wandered on many adventures, Ulysses returns to his island home of Ithaca to resume his life as a ruler. But he finds himself bored with the commonplace activities of daily life and longs to 'sail beyond the sunset' in search of more fulfilling life.

Where is Ulysses standing during his speech?

The clue to this lies in 'By this still hearth, among these barren crags, Match'd with an aged wife'. He is probably close to his home near some barren rocks. His dissatisfaction with his unexciting home, the surrounding area and his not-so-young wife is clear. This restlessness is further increased when Ulysses thinks about his own enviable role of doling out justice to his subjects whose principal aim in life is to eat, sleep and hoard material things. Their preoccupation with the mundane prevents them from understanding the real nature of their ruler, who cannot lead a similar life. He craves for an intense life full of excitement. Ulysses does not know the simple passions of the common man. His joys and sorrows have been equally tensed.

Both on the stormy sea or the shore, Ulysses is now famous with a great thirst for adventure, and for his travel far and wide. He has faced excitement of battles on the troubled plains of Troy. He has absorbed what he has experienced. Yet experience is like an arch through which the world that he has not yet travelled to, is visibly bright and shining. The more he sees, the more is there to see. To breathe is merely to exist but to act is to live. He has lived a full life but it was not enough and he feels that he has not many years to live. He would like to do something new. So, it would be evil to waste time in Ithaca. His desire is to seek knowledge which even human mind cannot perceive of.

Text

This is my son, mine own Telemachus,
to whom I leave the sceptre and the isle,—
Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfill
This labor, by slow prudence to make mild
A rugged people, and thro' soft degrees

Subdue them to the useful and the good.
Most blameless is he, centred in the sphere
Of common duties, decent not to fail
In offices of tenderness, and pay
Meet adoration to my household gods,
When I am gone. He works his work, I mine.

NOTES

Interpretation

The above stanza is spoken in praise of his son Telemachus. He bequeaths his kingdom and royal powers to him. He has great affection for his son and expects him to hold the same for his subjects. He wants him to make them know as to what is good for them. He assigns him duties and responsibilities, and himself takes up the pursuit of knowledge.

Text

There lies the port; the vessel puffs her sail;
There gloom the dark, broad seas. My mariners,
Souls that have toil'd, and wrought, and thought with me,—
That ever with a frolic welcome took
The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed
Free hearts, free foreheads,— you and I are old;
Old age hath yet his honor and his toil.
Death closes all; but something ere the end,
Some work of noble note, may yet be done,
Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.
The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks;
The long day wanes; the slow moon climbs; the deep
Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends.
'T is not too late to seek a newer world.
Push off, and sitting well in order smite
The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds

Interpretation

Addressing his mariners, he points to port and ship and dark blue sky. Ulysses and his mariners have lived their joys and sorrows together and grown old together. Knowing that death will put an end to everything, they can together strive to achieve some noble task that befits men who have worked with their trust in the Gods. It is now evening as the day begins to end and the moon rises to the sky and the sound of the sea can be heard all around. He urges his men that it is never too late to discover a new world and orders them to plough through the noisy waves.

NOTES

Text

To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die.
It may be that the gulfs will wash us down;
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,
And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.
Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'
We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are,—
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

Interpretation

Ulysses wishes to sail beyond the sunset i.e., west. Their destination would be bottom of the sea or paradise where all of them would be happy to meet Achilles, the Greek hero of the Trojan War. Ulysses says that although they are not that strong like the way they use to be in their younger days, they still have the strong will 'To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield'.

Ulysses represents the human desire to strive beyond human limits to achieve something great and noble.

Check Your Progress

1. Name the members of the Apostolic.
2. In which year was *The Passing of Arthur* published?
3. In which year was Tennyson named the Poet Laureate?
4. Why was Ulysses subjected to storms and obstacles on his way home?
5. When did Tennyson write the poem *Ulysses?*

7.3 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. The members of the Apostolic were famous thinkers like Arthur Henry Hallam, James Spedding, Edward Lushington and Richard Monckton Milnes.
2. The *Passing of Arthur* was published in 1859.
3. Tennyson was named the Poet Laureate in 1850.

4. Ulysses was subjected to storms and obstacles on his way home because of the wrath of sea god Poseidon.
5. Tennyson wrote this poem in a single day on 20 October, three weeks after he heard the news of Hallam's death in 1833.

NOTES

7.4 SUMMARY

- Tennyson was born on 6 August, 1809 in Somersby, Lincolnshire in England. Since childhood, he suffered a keen sense of 'want of money' and lifelong fear of mental disease- epilepsy.
- Tennyson was quite sensitive and got hurt easily by criticism. For nine years, he did not write just because he received criticism in a quarterly review. In 1850, he was honoured with Poet Laureate.
- Tennyson liked to use fairly elaborate stanzas in which he could swing his lines with the mood. Tennyson sometimes copied Keats' heraldic use of colour, but generally his use of colour images was simply for the mood or atmosphere.
- Like so many of his time, Tennyson was a warrier. He worried about God and Nature and man; about modern science and its effect on belief; about Darwin and the significance of his theory of evolution; and about the meaning of life.
- Tennyson said that the poem Ulysses 'was written under the sense of loss and that all had gone by, but that still life must be fought out to the end'. This is Tennyson's best poem in which there seems to be a balance between melancholy on one hand and a sense of living life actively on the other.
- Both on the stormy sea or the shore, Ulysses is now famous with a great thirst for adventure, and for his travel far and wide. He has faced excitement of battles on the troubled plains of Troy.
- Ulysses and his mariners have lived their joys and sorrows together and grown old together. Knowing that death will put an end to everything, they can together strive to achieve some noble task that befits men who have worked with their trust in the Gods.
- Ulysses wishes to sail beyond the sunset i.e., west. Their destination would be bottom of the sea or paradise where all of them would be happy to meet Achilles, the Greek hero of the Trojan War.

7.5 KEY WORDS

- **Ulysses:** It is the Roman name for Odysseus, a hero in ancient Greek literature, the king of Ithaca, who, after the siege of Troy, set sail for home. On his way home, he was subjected to many storms and obstacles because of the wrath of the sea god (Poseidon).

- **Poseidon:** He was one of the Twelve Olympians in ancient Greek religion and myth, god of the sea, storms, earthquakes and horses. In pre-Olympian Bronze Age Greece, he was venerated as a chief deity at Pylos and Thebes.

NOTES

7.6 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. List the poems written by Tennyson in the memory of Hallam.
2. Write a short note on Ulysses' praise of Telemachus.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Elaborate upon Ulysses' dissatisfaction with his unexciting home.
2. Analyze Ulysses' message to his mariners.

7.7 FURTHER READINGS

Campbell, Matthew 1999. *Rhythm & Will in Victorian Poetry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Stanford, W. B. 1954. The Ulysses Theme: a Study in the Adaptability of a Traditional Hero. New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell.

UNIT 8 MATTHEW ARNOLD

NOTES

Structure

8.0 Introduction
8.1 Objectives
8.2 Arnold's *Dover Beach*
8.3 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
8.4 Summary
8.5 Key Words
8.6 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
8.7 Further Readings

8.0 INTRODUCTION

Matthew Arnold was a critic and English Victorian poet born on December 24, 1822 in Liverpool, England. He worked as an inspector of schools and chastized the contemporary manners and tastes of the populace. He had an interest in folk tales, Hellenism and solitary meditation. His poem *Dover Beach* is a lyric written in 1867 that raises some of the most pressing issues of human existence and tries to provide a solution to the same for a content life. It explores the theme of melancholy and decline of faith. This unit provides a detailed analysis of the poem.

8.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss Matthew Arnold's early life and writing style
- Analyze Arnold's poem *Dover Beach*

8.2 ARNOLD'S *DOVER BEACH*

Matthew Arnold was born in 1822 at Laleham in England. He was educated in Winchester and Oxford. In 1841, he won an open scholarship to Balliol College, Oxford. His poem *Cromwell* won the Newdigate prize in 1843. In 1845, he started teaching at Rugby. In the same year, after a short interlude of teaching at Rugby, he was elected as the Fellow of Oriel College, distinction at Oxford. In 1847, he became private secretary to Lord Lansdowne, Lord President of the Council of U.K. He remained loyal to France and French connection throughout his life. He died in 1888.

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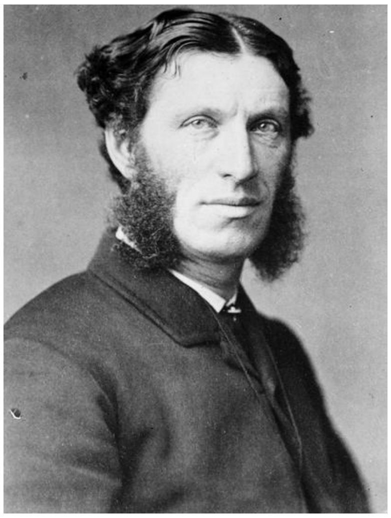


Fig. 8.1 *Matthew Arnold*

He represented his age in a profound manner by being the true voice of sensitive Victorian intellectual brooding over inevitable loss of faith and the meaning of life. Nineteenth century Hellenism, romantic interest in folk tales and legends, the preference for solitary meditation in evocative surroundings- these elements give distinctive character to his poetry. His first volume was *The Strayed Reveller and Other Poems*, which was published in 1849 anonymously but was immediately withdrawn from circulation. In 1852, Arnold published his second volume of poems, *Empedocles on Etna, and Other Poems*. But he did not reprint the long title poem because situations 'in which suffering finds no vent in action, in which a continuous state of mental distress is prolonged, unrelieved by incident, hope or resistance, in which there is everything to be endured, nothing to be done' are not fit subjects for poetry. 'What are the eternal objects of poetry and at all times?' Arnold asked in his 1853 preface and he replied, 'they are actions, human actions, possessing an inherent interest in themselves and which are to be communicated in an interesting manner by the art of the poet'. Arnold is as great an exponent of Victorian elegiac as Tennyson. According to him, main duty of a writer is to present his criticism of life in whatever medium he can as richly, luminously and broadly as possible. In his poem *Dover Beach*, he reflects the Victorian problems. Loss of faith is given its most memorable utterance; public values have disappeared and all that is left are the private affections, little society of love and friendship. His two best known poems are *The Scholar Gipsy* (1853), which is about the poet himself and his generations, and *Thyrsis* (1866), which is an elegy to Arthur Hugh Clough who died in 1861.

Dover Beach

Text

The sea is calm tonight.
The tide is full, the moon lies fair
Upon the straits; on the French coast the light

NOTES

Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,
Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.
Come to the window, sweet is the night air!
Only, from the long line of spray
Where the sea meets the moon-blanched land,
Listen! you hear the grating roar
Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,
At their return, up the high strand,
Begin, and cease, and then again begin,
With tremulous cadence slow, and bring
The eternal note of sadness in.

Interpretation

Dover Beach is one of the most admired of Arnold's poems today. *Dover Beach* is the Victorian lyric of painful doubt and disorientation. First published in 1867, this poem has always been regarded as a representative poem of Arnold, typical of his outlook on life. The general decline of faith and melancholy constitute the theme of the poem. Samuel Barber, an American composer of orchestral, opera, choral, and piano music, composed a musical setting to it which has been recorded.

Arnold tries to show the lack of faith and certitude in a world which is materially expanding. The poem opens with an image of the sea, which is a recurring feature in most English Literature. As we know that England is an island, the sea is never far away. But the sea can mean different things to different poets and writers. For Byron, in his poem 'Ocean', the sea is an angry potent force that punishes man for his pettiness. The sea can be bountiful; it can be benevolent as it brings 'the sailor home from the sea'. It can also separate lovers as it does in the context of Arnold's poem *To Marguerite*. Let us now see how sea is handled in *Dover Beach*.

Although Arnold completed the poem *Dover Beach* in 1851 or 1852, it only appeared in a collection entitled *New Poems*, published in London. In fact, a manuscript of part of *Dover Beach* dates back to June 1851 when Arnold went on his honeymoon with his wife Lucy, after they were married on 10 June 1851. Nature is at its best as Lucy and Arnold look at the moon and the calm sea, and on this clear night can see the light on the French coast. Yet this perfect setting does not evoke any romantic feelings in the poet. On the other hand, the mood is of melancholy and nostalgia for the loss of faith. Once again, Arnold outlines the human condition and feels that love alone can somewhat lessen the pain of isolation and suffering.

One of Arnold's most celebrated lyrics, the tone of this poem is almost conversational.

NOTES

According to literary critic J.D. Jump, *Dover Beach* 'is a short poem, but it embraces a great range and depth of significance'. What is Arnold's main pre-occupation in this poem? He ruminates on the loss of religious faith and the subsequent vulnerability of human beings to the sufferings and pains of life. It is only through a satisfying love-relationship that one can wrest a meaningful existence in an otherwise meaningless and hostile universe.

Arnold spent a night in Dover while on his honeymoon trip with Lucy. Here, he is standing at the window with Lucy by his side on exceptionally clear night looking at the sea. Not only is it clear but Arnold's opening lines suggest calmness and stability: a kind of poise that Arnold desires for himself.

Arnold observes that the sea is calm, the tide is high and the moon is shining on the English Channel. On the distant French coast, he can see a slight flicker of light, which shines briefly and then disappears. The white cliffs of Dover can be seen large and shinning in the curve of shore. The poet tenderly beckons his wife to the window where she too can enjoy the pleasant breeze. Up to this point, nature is calm, beautiful and soothing. But from here on, the poet discerns the underlying grating sound, which he describes at some length till the end of the first stanza. The poet draws his wife's attention to the moonlit beach and to the point where the waves lap the shore and the sound of the pebbles as they are dragged along the beach by the receding waves. These pebbles are once again pushed up the sloping beach as the tide returns. Thus, there is constant sound and motion that begins and ceases, and begins again. The trembling rhythm seems to symbolize some kind of unending sorrow.

Text

Sophocles long ago
Heard it on the Aegean, and it brought
Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow
Of human misery; we
Find also in the sound a thought,
Hearing it by this distant northern sea.

Interpretation

Lines 14-20 carry forward this notion of eternity by harking back to the time of Sophocles. This 'grating roar' was probably also heard by Sophocles long ago on the shores of the Aegean sea, and it was this that perhaps induced in his mind the sense of miseries in human life, which are reflected in his great tragedies. Just as the sound of the ebb and flow of the waves was able to evoke the feeling of human miseries in Sophocles' mind, so also it evokes similar thoughts in the mind of Arnold and his wife who stand much further north, separated from him by time and space.

NOTES

Text

The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.

Interpretations

From this reference to Sophocles and the past, Arnold returns to the immediate present ruminating philosophically on the spiritual decline that had besieged human beings. But this thinking is done in the shape of images. Arnold explains that at one time religious faith supported and helped mankind, and was at its strongest. This religious faith was like a beautiful garment that engirdled the earth. In short, this faith was universal. But now the poet can only hear the receding tide, which draws back with a sad sound to the music of the night winds leaving the beach exposed and uncovered. Similarly, the poet is aware of the fact that people have lost faith in religion, which has withdrawn from everywhere like the outgoing tide. This spiritual decline has left human beings vulnerable and exposed to the sorrows of life.

Text

Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

Interpretation

What can one do in such a situation? The poet appeals to Lucy once more. He believes that if they love each other truly, they will be able to discover some value in life. Loss of religious faith had made it impossible to believe that the universe was to some extent adjusted to human needs. He says that the world they can see before them is beautiful like a dream. But in spite of its varied beauty, it cannot offer joy, love, hope or certainty to anyone. People can have no peace and continue to suffer pain.

NOTES

From the image of the sea, the poet moves in the final lines to a startling new image – that of a field with the battle raging in the dark where it is not clear who is the friend or who is the enemy or why they are fighting at all.

The melancholy tone of the poem arises from a feeling of deep despair. The stanzas are of different length and the lines move with a steady and poised rhythm.

The sea is calm tonight
The tide is full...

The ebbing and flowing of the waves and the consequent 'grating roar' is evoked vividly in 'draw back', 'fling', and 'begin and cease, and then again begin'. J.D. Jump calls this 'a combination of metrical and syntactical means', a combination of sound and sense to present this wonderfully rich image.

But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night- wind....

According to literary critic Miriam Allot, the above lines are 'probably the most musically expressive passage in all of Arnold's poetry and a valid poetic equivalent for his feelings of loss, exposure and dismay'.

The image of the sea is present throughout the poem. But in the last three lines, we are taken to a 'darkling plain'. The sea is calm at the outset. Slowly a 'grating roar' is discernable, an ebb and flow that turns the poet's thoughts to meditate on the loss of faith with which humanity is now beset. This loss of religion is depicted by the image of the receding tide with 'its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar'. What is the result of the loss of faith? Without religious faith, which invests in life with some meaning and sense of value, the world is like an anarchic battlefield in the dark where people ignorant of their friends and foes are engaged in a hideous clash. As we know, poems with philosophic meditations are usually not very lyrical or appealing. However, *Dover Beach* is both. How has Arnold succeeded in creating this rich lyric? He has worked in images which have given a concrete aspect to his thought. These images then evoke delightful feelings in the reader who responds to the sheer visual power of the metaphors used.

In most of Arnold's poems, we have noticed a melancholy strain. Arnold's poetry appeals primarily to the intellect but it also appeals to our senses through the use of power images, chief of which is the sea.

Check Your Progress

1. Which elements gave a distinctive character to Arnold's poetry?
2. What is the theme of *Dover Beach?*
3. What is the result of the loss of faith as per Arnold?

8.3 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

NOTES

1. Nineteenth century Hellenism, romantic interest in folk tales and legends, the preference for solitary mediation in evocative surroundings- these elements give distinctive character to his poetry.
2. The general decline of faith and melancholy constitute the theme of the poem.
3. Without religious faith, which invests in life with some meaning and sense of value, the world is like an anarchic battlefield in the dark where people ignorant of their friends and foes are engaged in a hideous clash.

8.4 SUMMARY

- Matthew Arnold was born in 1822 at Laleham in England. He was educated in Winchester and Oxford. In 1841, he won an open scholarship to Balliol College, Oxford. His poem *Cromwell* won the Newdigate prize in 1843.
- Arnold's first volume was *The Strayed Reveller and Other Poems*, which was published in 1849 anonymously but was immediately withdrawn from circulation. In 1852, Arnold published his second volume of poems, *Empedocles on Etna, and Other Poems*.
- Arnold is as great an exponent of Victorian elegiac as Tennyson. According to him, main duty of a writer is to present his criticism of life in whatever medium he can as richly, luminously and broadly as possible. In his poem *Dover Beach*, he reflects the Victorian problems.
- *Dover Beach* is one of the most admired of Arnold's poems today. *Dover Beach* is the Victorian lyric of painful doubt and disorientation. The general decline of faith and melancholy constitute the theme of the poem. Samuel Barber, an American composer of orchestral, opera, choral, and piano music, composed a musical setting to it which has been recorded.
- Arnold tries to show the lack of faith and certitude in a world which is materially expanding. The poem opens with an image of the sea, which is a recurring feature in most English Literature.
- What is Arnold's main pre-occupation in this poem? He ruminates on the loss of religious faith and the subsequent vulnerability of human beings to the sufferings and pains of life.
- Just as the sound of the ebb and flow of the waves was able to evoke the feeling of human miseries in Sophocles' mind, so also it evokes similar thoughts in the mind of Arnold and his wife who stand much further north, separated from him by time and space.

NOTES

- Arnold explains that at one time religious faith supported and helped mankind, and was at its strongest. This religious faith was like a beautiful garment that engirdled the earth. In short, this faith was universal.
- In most of Arnold's poems, we have noticed a melancholy strain. Arnold's poetry appeals primarily to the intellect but it also appeals to our senses through the use of power images, chief of which is the sea.

8.5 KEY WORDS

- **Newdigate Prize:** It is awarded to students of the University of Oxford for the Best Composition in English verse by an undergraduate who has been admitted to Oxford within the previous four years.
- **Victorian Literature:** English writing from this era reflects the major transformation in most aspects of English life, such as significant scientific, economic, and technological advances to changes in class structures and the role of religion in society.

8.6 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. What reason did Arnold give for not reprinting his second volume of poems?
2. What are some interpretations of 'sea' for different writers and poets?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Discuss lines 14-20 of *Dover Beach*.
2. Elaborate upon Arnold's views on spiritual decline and religion in the poem.

8.7 FURTHER READINGS

Tinker, C. B. and H. F. Lowry. 1940. *The Poetry of Matthew Arnold: A Commentary*. New York: Oxford University Press.

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Honan, Park. 1981. *Matthew Arnold, a life*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

BLOCK - III

PROSE

NOTES

UNIT 9 CHARLES LAMB

Structure

9.0 Introduction
9.1 Objectives
9.2 Lamb as an Essayist
  9.2.1 Dream Children: A Reverie
9.3 The Praise of Chimney Sweepers
9.4 A Dissertation Upon Roast Pig
9.5 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
9.6 Summary
9.7 Key Words
9.8 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
9.9 Further Readings

9.0 INTRODUCTION

English essayist Charles Lamb, best known for his *Essays of Elia,* wrote on a plethora of issues. He gained popularity as a prominent literary figure for his treatment of everyday subjects. His essays are known for the incorporation of wit and humour. In 'Dream Children: A Reverie', Lamb's understanding of child psychology is evident. The readers can also trace autobiographical elements in the essay. Another important work is 'The Praise of the Chimney Sweepers'. In this essay, Lamb depicts the miserable life of chimney sweepers. Lamb's essay 'A Dissertation Upon Roast Pig' very humorously presents the way in which the roasted pic, which is a culinary delight in the western nations, has been discovered accidentally. In this unit, the aforementioned essays have been discussed in detail.

9.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss Charles Lamb's literary contributions
- Examine the autobiographical element in 'Dream Children: A Reverie'
- Analyze Lamb's portrayal of child labour in 'The Praise of the Chimney Sweeper'
- Describe the premise of Lamb's essay' A Dissertation Upon Roast Pig'

NOTES

9.2 LAMB AS AN ESSAYIST

Charles Lamb, a well-known literary figure in the nineteenth century, is chiefly remembered for his *Essays of Elia*. This collection is famous for his wit and ironic treatment of everyday subjects. Due to the element of nostalgia and humorous idiosyncrasies in his essays, his works were celebrated throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century.

The personal and conversational tone of the essays has charmed many readers; the essays established Lamb as the most delightful of English essayists. Lamb himself is the Elia of the collection, and his sister Mary is 'Cousin Bridget.' Lamb used the pseudonym Elia for an essay on the South Sea House, where he had worked decades earlier; Elia was the last name of an Italian man who worked there at the same time as Charles. This was why this name was used by Lamb.

His essays brought in a new kind of warmth to English prose. A critic had pointed out, 'His sentences can be intense, they can sneer, they can scream, but they always have a kind of rounded glow, like a welcoming, slightly melancholy fireplace.'

'Lamb's humour, humanity, and the sense of pathos are all his own; and it is mainly these qualities which differentiate his essays from those of his contemporaries. His essays are rich alike in wit, humour, and fun.'

Editors, Hallward and Hill observe in the Introduction to their edition of the *Essays of Elia*:

'The terms wit, humour and fun are often confused but they are really different in meaning. The first is based on intellect, the second on insight and sympathy, the third on vigor and freshness of mind and body. Lamb's writings show all the three qualities, but what most distinguishes him is humour, for his sympathy is ever strong and active.'

9.2.1 Dream Children: A Reverie

'CHILDREN love to listen to stories about their elders, when they were children; to stretch their imagination to the conception of a traditionary great-uncle or grandame, whom they never saw. It was in this spirit that my little ones crept about me the other evening to hear about their great-grandmother Field, who lived in a great house in Norfolk (a hundred times bigger than that in which they and papa lived) which had been the scene—so at least it was generally believed in that part of the country—of the tragic incidents which they had lately become familiar with from the ballad of the Children in the Wood. Certain it is that the whole story of the children and their cruel uncle was to be seen fairly carved out in wood upon the chimney-piece of the great hall, the whole story down to the Robin Redbreasts, till a foolish rich person pulled it down to set up a marble one of modern invention in its stead, with no story upon it. Here Alice put out one of her dear mother's looks, too tender to be called upbraiding. Then I went on to say, how religious and how good their great-grandmother Field was, how beloved and respected by everybody, though she was not indeed the mistress of this

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great house, but had only the charge of it (and yet in some respects she might be said to be the mistress of it too) committed to her by the owner, who preferred living in a newer and more fashionable mansion which he had purchased somewhere in the adjoining county; but still she lived in it in a manner as if it had been her own, and kept up the dignity of the great house in a sort while she lived, which afterward came to decay, and was nearly pulled down, and all its old ornaments stripped and carried away to the owner's other house, where they were set up, and looked as awkward as if some one were to carry away the old tombs they had seen lately at the Abbey, and stick them up in Lady C.'s tawdry gilt drawing-room. Here John smiled, as much as to say, "that would be foolish indeed." And then I told how, when she came to die, her funeral was attended by a concourse of all the poor, and some of the gentry too, of the neighborhood for many miles round, to show their respect for her memory, because she had been such a good and religious woman; so good indeed that she knew all the Psaltery by heart, aye, and a great part of the Testament besides. Here little Alice spread her hands. Then I told what a tall, upright, graceful person their great-grandmother Field once was; and how in her youth she was esteemed the best dancer—here Alice's little right foot played an involuntary movement, till upon my looking grave, it desisted—the best dancer, I was saying, in the county, till a cruel disease, called a cancer, came, and bowed her down with pain; but it could never bend her good spirits, or make them stoop, but they were still upright, because she was so good and religious. Then I told how she was used to sleep by herself in a lone chamber of the great lone house; and how she believed that an apparition of two infants was to be seen at midnight gliding up and down the great staircase near where she slept, but she said "those innocents would do her no harm"; and how frightened I used to be, though in those days I had my maid to sleep with me, because I was never half so good or religious as she—and yet I never saw the infants. Here John expanded all his eyebrows and tried to look courageous. Then I told how good she was to all her grand-children, having us to the great house in the holidays, where I in particular used to spend many hours by myself, in gazing upon the old busts of the Twelve Cæsars, that had been Emperors of Rome, till the old marble heads would seem to live again, or I to be turned into marble with them; how I never could be tired with roaming about that huge mansion, with its vast empty rooms, with their worn-out hangings, fluttering tapestry, and carved oaken panels, with the gilding almost rubbed out—sometimes in the spacious old-fashioned gardens, which I had almost to myself, unless when now and then a solitary gardening man would cross me—and how the nectarines and peaches hung upon the walls, without my ever offering to pluck them, because they were forbidden fruit, unless now and then,—and because I had more pleasure in strolling about among the old melancholy-looking yew trees, or the firs, and picking up the red berries, and the fir apples, which were good for nothing but to look at—or in lying about upon the fresh grass, with all the fine garden smells around me—or basking in the orangery, till I could almost fancy myself ripening, too, along with the oranges and the limes in that grateful warmth—or in watching the dace that darted to and fro in the fish pond, at the bottom of the garden, with here and there a great sulky pike hanging midway down the water in silent state, as if it mocked at their impertinent friskings,—I had more pleasure in these busy-idle diversions than in all the sweet flavors of peaches, nectarines, oranges, and such like common baits of children. Here John slyly deposited back upon the plate a bunch of grapes, which, not unobserved by Alice, he had mediated dividing with her, and both seemed willing to relinquish them for the present as irrelevant. Then, in somewhat

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a more heightened tone, I told how, though their great-grandmother Field loved all her grand-children, yet in an especial manner she might be said to love their uncle, John L——, because he was so handsome and spirited a youth, and a king to the rest of us; and, instead of moping about in solitary corners, like some of us, he would mount the most mettlesome horse he could get, when but an imp no bigger than themselves, and make it carry him half over the county in a morning, and join the hunters when there were any out—and yet he loved the old great house and gardens too, but had too much spirit to be always pent up within their boundaries —and how their uncle grew up to man's estate as brave as he was handsome, to the admiration of everybody, but of their great-grandmother Field most especially; and how he used to carry me upon his back when I was a lame-footed boy—for he was a good bit older than me—many a mile when I could not walk for pain;—and how in after life he became lame-footed too, and I did not always (I fear) make allowances enough for him when he was impatient, and in pain, nor remember sufficiently how considerate he had been to me when I was lame-footed; and how when he died, though he had not been dead an hour, it seemed as if he had died a great while ago, such a distance there is betwixt life and death; and how I bore his death as I thought pretty well at first, but afterward it haunted and haunted me; and though I did not cry or take it to heart as some do, and as I think he would have done if I had died, yet I missed him all day long, and knew not till then how much I had loved him. I missed his kindness, and I missed his crossness, and wished him to be alive again, to be quarreling with him (for we quarreled sometimes), rather than not have him again, and was as uneasy without him, as he their poor uncle must have been when the doctor took off his limb. Here the children fell a crying, and asked if their little mourning which they had on was not for uncle John, and they looked up and prayed me not to go on about their uncle, but to tell them some stories about their pretty, dead mother. Then I told them how for seven long years, in hope sometimes, sometimes in despair, yet persisting ever, I courted the fair Alice W——n; and, as much as children could understand, I explained to them what coyness, and difficulty, and denial meant in maidens—when suddenly, turning to Alice, the soul of the first Alice looked out at her eyes with such a reality of re-presentment, that I became in doubt which of them stood there before me, or whose that bright hair was; and while I stood gazing, both the children gradually grew fainter to my view, receding, and still receding till nothing at last but two mournful features were seen in the uttermost distance, which, without speech, strangely impressed upon me the effects of speech: "We are not of Alice, nor of thee, nor are we children at all. The children of Alice call Bartrum father. We are nothing; less than nothing, and dreams. We are only what might have been, and must wait upon the tedious shores of Lethe millions of ages before we have existence, and a name"—and immediately awaking, I found myself quietly seated in my bachelor armchair, where I had fallen asleep, with the faithful Bridget unchanged by my side—but John L. (or James Elia) was gone forever.'

Outline of the Essay

One evening Alice and John (Lamb's dream children – in reality Lamb had no children) came to him to hear from him an account of their elders. Lamb told them about their great-grandmother Field, Uncle John Lamb and their mother Alice Winterton.

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Lamb told the children that their great-grandmother lived in a big house in Norfolk. She lived in such a way that she always seemed to be the owner of the great house while she was only its keeper. But she maintained the dignity of the house. It was an old house with a wooden chimney. On the chimney was carved the full story of the ballad, *The Children in the Wood*. But a foolish rich man, who purchased that house, replaced the wooden chimney with a marble one with no ballad on it. Their great-grandmother was a very religious and pious woman. She knew all the psalms by heart. She was a woman of a good nature and sweet temperament. She was loved and respected by all. When she died, her funeral was attended by a concourse of all the poor, and some of the gentry too, of the neighbourhood for many miles round, to show their respect for her memory. She was a patient of cancer; her disease bowed down her body, but it could never bow down her spirit. She was very courageous. Despite the fact that the house was haunted by the ghost of two children, she would sleep alone in the house with no fear. She loved all her grandchildren very much; she would invite them to the great house to enjoy their holidays; Lamb, the author, used to spend his holidays there. He often wandered about the house for hours all alone. The house had the busts of twelve Caesars, the Roman Emperors.He used to go on staring at them until they appeared to be living persons or he himself a marble statue. He enjoyed wandering in the gardens as well.

Charles Lamb then told his children about their uncle John Lamb. John was brave, handsome, kind and considerate, and was loved by all. Although great-grandmother Field had equal love for all the children, she had special affection for him. He was a good horse-rider. Charles Lamb remembers how, when once he was 'a lame-footed boy', John carried him (Charles) on his back for miles. Charles remembers with regret that, quite to the contrary, when John himself was lame-footed, he could not do anything for him. After his premature death, Charles often missed his kindness and always wished him to be alive again.

After hearing the sad tale of John's life, the dream children became so sad that they requested their father (Charles Lamb – the dream father) not to go any further about their uncle. They requested him to tell them something about their dead mother. Then he told them 'how for seven long years, he courted the fair Alice W—n. Alice, his daughter, resembled her mother very much'. As Lamb stared at her face, the children gradually grew fainter to his view. They spoke nothing, but seemed to be saying that they were not his children; they were nothing; less than nothing, and dreams. This reality shattered the dream of the author, and brought him back into his bachelor arm-chair. His sister Bridget was sitting by his side.

Some Important Explanations

1. *Children love ………………. never saw.*

   Reference to the Context- These are the opening lines of the essay, 'Dream Children' by Charles Lamb, a famous essayist of the Age of Romanticism. He is known as the 'Prince among Essayists.'

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Charles Lamb, in this essay, tells us about the children's liking for listening about their elders. He presents before us his brother John Lamb; and his beloved, Alice Winterton (Ann Simmons).

Explanation– In these lines, the author gives us some idea of his understanding of child psychology. Children always like to listen to facts from the lives of their elders, when they (the elders) were children. In other words, it is the hobby of the children to know about the activities and circumstances of their elders when they themselves were young children. With the help of their imagination, they try to form an idea of their great uncle or grandmother about whom they are habituated to hear, but whom they never saw.

Note:—The whole essay, and particularly, these lines exhibit that Lamb, in spite of the fact that he could never become father, had a good and remarkable understanding of child psychology.

2. *Then I told ………………. with them.*

   Explanation– In these lines, Lamb speaks of the goodness of his grandmother. While telling his dream children – Alice and John – about their great grandmother, he said that she was very affectionate and kind to all her grandchildren. She used to invite all of them to her great house in Norfolk during the holidays. Besides all the other attractive objects, the house had the busts of twelve Caesars, the Roman Emperors. Lamb would go on gazing upon them so fixedly that the lifeless busts seemed to him as living persons or felt that he himself had become lifeless like the statues there.

   Note:—This speaks of Lamb's love and interest in observing the beauty of architectural pieces.

3. *We are not………. name.*

   Explanation– Having told his children about their great-grandmother Field, Uncle John Lamb, and mother Alice Winterton, Charles Lamb stares at the face of Alice. The dream children grew fainter to his view. Though they spoke nothing yet they appeared to be saying that they were not of Alice, nor of the author. They went to the extent of saying that they were not children at all. They then presented the harsh reality of Lamb's life before him that it was not he, but it was Bartrum, whom the children of Alice would call father. (Although Charles has wooed Alice for seven long years yet he could not succeed in marrying her. She was married to Bartrum, a pawnbroker in London). The children further said that they were nothing, and less than nothing. They, in their own eyes, were only dreams. They said that they were only that which might have been, i.e. if Charles Lamb had succeeded in marrying Alice, they would have been his real children. Also they acquainted Lamb with the reality that he had to wait for ages on the

tiresome banks of Lethe, the river of forgetfulness. Only after that they would be able to get resistance and name. In other words, they had to pass through the whole process of human birth and existence.

Note:—In Greek mythology 'Lethe' is one of the rivers of hell causing forgetfulness of the past to all who drank of it. This word in Greek stands for oblivion. 'The idea of the soul, waiting for incarnation, sitting on the banks of Lethe, is platonic.'

Autobiographical Element in 'Dream Children'

In 'Dream Children', Charles Lamb presents the facts about his own life, about his grandmother Field, and his brother John lamb. In this essay, he talks to his dream children. He tells them about their great grandmother Field. She was, according to him, upright and graceful, gentle and generous, and religious and courageous. She, in her youth, was the best dancer in the area in which she lived. She was a housekeeper in Norfolk but she lived in such a way as if she herself were the owner of the great house. She was loved and respected by all. She loved all her grandchildren very much. But she had special affection for John Lamb, the elder brother of Charles Lamb. She invited all her grandchildren to her house during their holidays.

This essay also tells us about his brother, John Lamb, who was dead. It also tells us of the great love that he had for his brother and how he missed him, and felt lonely without him. Charles Lamb depicts him as very kind and sympathetic to him and the family. It is due to his love of mystification that Lamb depicts him so. In reality, he (John) was selfish and unsympathetic. He did nothing even for his parents and mentally ill sister.

Through this essay, we also come to know of his unsuccessful love-affair with Alice Winterton. He courted her for seven long years, but all in vain. She married Bartrum, not the author, and the latter remained bachelor throughout his life. He, consequently, had no children. In the face of Alice, one of the dream children, he sees the image of his wife (Alice Winterton, whose real name is Ann Simmons, whom he loved and courted for seven years).

This essay, besides being a vivid description of the persons and events closely associated with Charles Lamb's life, is the best example of the fact that 'Charles Lamb laughs with tears in his eyes.' He experienced in his life various despairs and frustrations, sorrows and sufferings, and troubles and tensions. Charles' sister, in a fit of insanity, stabbed her mother. Charles Lamb looked after her (sister) throughout his life. He got no cooperation from his brother John Lamb. Even his love-affair with Alice Winterton (Ann Simmons) gave him only frustration and dejection. This shows that his life was a tale of sorrow. He laughs to check his tears.

This essay is full of pathos and humour. The dominant note of the essay is pathos, but touches of humour are also present. The tale of his Grandmother

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Field's life is full of pathos. The description of John becoming lame is also pathetic. The tale of John's life becomes all the more pathetic the moment Charles Lamb says to his children: 'I missed his kindness, and I missed his crossness and wished him to be alive again, to be quarrelling with him (for we quarreled sometimes), rather than not have him again, and was an uneasy without him, as he, their poor uncle, must have been when the doctor took off his limb.'

Children's expressions and activities sometimes provide the essay with a tinge of humour. While listening about her great grandmother's talent of dancing – 'Alice's little right foot played an involuntary movement'. She stops it the moment she notices her father looking grave. When Lamb tells his children about his dislike for the fruits in the garden of his grandmother, John puts back the bunch of grapes into the plate. These childlike activities give some humour to the otherwise serious essay. According to the author, Compton-Rickett, 'Humour with Lamb is never far from tragedy, through his tears you may see the rainbow in the sky, for him humour and pathos are really inseparable from one another, they are different facets of the same gem.'

Check Your Progress

1. Which pseudonym did Charles Lamb use for his literary works?
2. Which author is known as the 'Prince among Essayists'?

9.3 THE PRAISE OF CHIMNEY SWEEPERS

'I like to meet a sweeper — understand me — not a grown sweeper — old chimney-sweepers are by no means attractive — but one of those tender novices, blooming through their first nigritude, the maternal washings not quite effaced from the cheek — such as come forth with the dawn, or somewhat earlier, with their little professional notes sounding like the peep peep of a young sparrow; or liker to the matin lark should I pronounce them, in their aerial ascents not seldom anticipating the sun-rise? I have a kindly yearning towards these dim specks — poor blots — innocent blacknesses —

I reverence these young Africans of our own growth — these almost clergy imps, who sport their cloth without assumption; and from their little pulpits (the tops of chimneys), in the nipping air of a December morning, preach a lesson of patience to mankind.

When a child, what a mysterious pleasure it was to witness their operation! to see a chit no bigger than one's self enter, one knew not by what process, into what seemed the fauces Averni— to pursue him in imagination, as he went sounding on through so many dark stifling caverns, horrid shades! — to shudder with the idea that "now, surely, he must be lost for ever!"— to revive at hearing his feeble

shout of discovered day-light — and then (O fulness of delight) running out of doors, to come just in time to see the sable phenomenon emerge in safety, the brandished weapon of his art victorious like some flag waved over a conquered citadel! I seem to remember having been told, that a bad sweep was once left in a stack with his brush, to indicate which way the wind blew. It was an awful spectacle certainly; not much unlike the old stage direction in Macbeth, where the "Apparition of a child crowned with a tree in his hand rises."

Reader, if thou meetest one of these small gentry in thy early rambles, it is good to give him a penny. It is better to give him two-pence. If it be starving weather, and to the proper troubles of his hard occupation, a pair of kibed heels (no unusual accompaniment) be superadded, the demand on thy humanity will surely rise to a tester.

There is a composition, the ground-work of which I have understood to be the sweet wood 'yclept sassafras. This wood boiled down to a kind of tea, and tempered with an infusion of milk and sugar, hath to some tastes a delicacy beyond the China luxury. I know not how thy palate may relish it; for myself, with every deference to the judicious Mr. Read, who hath time out of mind kept open a shop (the only one he avers in London) for the vending of this "wholesome and pleasant beverage, on the south side of Fleet-street, as thou approachest Bridge-street — the only Salopian house,"— I have never yet adventured to dip my own particular lip in a basin of his commended ingredients — a cautious premonition to the olfactories constantly whispering to me, that my stomach must infallibly, with all due courtesy, decline it. Yet I have seen palates, otherwise not uninstructed in dietetical elegances, sup it up with avidity.

I know not by what particular conformation of the organ it happens, but I have always found that this composition is surprisingly gratifying to the palate of a young chimney-sweeper — whether the oily particles (sassafras is slightly oleaginous) do attenuate and soften the fuliginous concretions, which are sometimes found (in dissections) to adhere to the roof of the mouth in these unfledged practitioners; or whether Nature, sensible that she had mingled too much of bitter wood in the lot of these raw victims, caused to grow out of the earth her sassafras for a sweet lenitive — but so it is, that no possible taste or odour to the senses of a young chimney-sweeper can convey a delicate excitement comparable to this mixture. Being penniless, they will yet hang their black heads over the ascending steam, to gratify one sense if possible, seemingly no less pleased than those domestic animals — cats — when they purr over a new-found sprig of valerian. There is something more in these sympathies than philosophy can inculcate.

Now albeit Mr. Read boasteth, not without reason, that his is the only Salopian house; yet be it known to thee, reader — if thou art one who keepest what are called good hours, thou art haply ignorant of the fact — he hath a race of industrious imitators, who from stalls, and under open sky, dispense the same savoury mess to humbler customers, at that dead time of the dawn, when (as extremes meet) the

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rake, reeling home from his midnight cups, and the hard-handed artisan leaving his bed to resume the premature labours of the day, jostle, not unfrequently to the manifest disconcerting of the former, for the honours of the pavement. It is the time when, in summer, between the expired and the not yet relumined kitchen-fires, the kennels of our fair metropolis give forth their least satisfactory odours. The rake, who wisheth to dissipate his o'er-night vapours in more grateful coffee, curses the ungenial fume, as he passeth; but the artisan stops to taste, and blesses the fragrant breakfast.

This is Saloop— the precocious herb-woman's darling — the delight of the early gardener, who transports his smoking cabbages by break of day from Hammersmith to Covent-garden's famed piazzas — the delight, and, oh I fear, too often the envy, of the unpennied sweep. Him shouldest thou haply encounter, with his dim visage pendent over the grateful steam, regale him with a sumptuous basin (it will cost thee but three half-pennies) and a slice of delicate bread and butter (an added halfpenny)— so may thy culinary fires, eased of the o'er-charged secretions from thy worse-placed hospitalities, curl up a lighter volume to the welkin — so may the descending soot never taint thy costly well-ingredienced soups — nor the odious cry, quick reaching from street to street, of the fired chimney, invite the rattling engines from ten adjacent parishes, to disturb for a casual scintillation thy peace and pocket!

I am by nature extremely susceptible of street affronts; the jeers and taunts of the populace; the low-bred triumph they display over the casual trip, or splashed stocking, of a gentleman. Yet can I endure the jocularity of a young sweep with something more than forgiveness. — In the last winter but one, pacing along Cheapside with my accustomed precipitation when I walk westward, a treacherous slide brought me upon my back in an instant. I scrambled up with pain and shame enough — yet outwardly trying to face it down, as if nothing had happened — when the roguish grin of one of these young wits encountered me. There he stood, pointing me out with his dusky finger to the mob, and to a poor woman (I suppose his mother) in particular, till the tears for the exquisiteness of the fun (so he thought it) worked themselves out at the corners of his poor red eyes, red from many a previous weeping, and soot-inflamed, yet twinkling through all with such a joy, snatched out of desolation, that Hogarth — but Hogarth has got him already (how could he miss him?) in the March to Finchley, grinning at the pye-man — there he stood, as he stands in the picture, irremovable, as if the jest was to last forever — with such a maximum of glee, and minimum of mischief, in his mirth — for the grin of a genuine sweep hath absolutely no malice in it — that I could have been content, if the honour of a gentleman might endure it, to have remained his butt and his mockery till midnight.

I am by theory obdurate to the seductiveness of what are called a fine set of teeth. Every pair of rosy lips (the ladies must pardon me) is a casket, presumably holding such jewels; but, methinks, they should take leave to "air" them as frugally as possible. The fine lady, or fine gentleman, who show me their teeth, show me

bones. Yet must I confess, that from the mouth of a true sweep a display (even to ostentation) of those white and shining ossifications, strikes me as an agreeable anomaly in manners, and an allowable piece of foppery. It is, as when

A sable cloud
Turns forth her silver lining on the night.

It is like some remnant of gentry not quite extinct; a badge of better days; a hint of nobility:— and, doubtless, under the obscuring darkness and double night of their forlorn disguisement, oftentimes lurketh good blood, and gentle conditions, derived from lost ancestry, and a lapsed pedigree. The premature apprenticements of these tender victims give but too much encouragement, I fear, to clandestine, and almost infantile abductions; the seeds of civility and true courtesy, so often discernible in these young grafts (not otherwise to be accounted for) plainly hint at some forced adoptions; many noble Rachels mourning for their children, even in our days, countenance the fact; the tales of fairy-spiriting may shadow a lamentable verity, and the recovery of the young Montagu be but a solitary instance of, good fortune, out of many irreparable and hopeless defiliations.

In one of the state-beds at Arundel Castle, a few years since — under a ducal canopy —(that seat of the Howards is an object of curiosity to visitors, chiefly for its beds, in which the late duke was especially a connoisseur)— encircled with curtains of delicate crimson, with starry coronets inwoven — folded between a pair of sheets whiter and softer than the lap where Venus lulled Ascanius — was discovered by chance, after all methods of search had failed, at noon-day, fast asleep, a lost chimney-sweeper. The little creature, having somehow confounded his passage among the intricacies of those lordly chimneys, by some unknown aperture had alighted upon this magnificent chamber; and, tired with his tedious explorations, was unable to resist the delicious invitation to repose, which he there saw exhibited; so, creeping between the sheets very quietly, laid his black head upon the pillow, and slept like a young Howard.

Such is the account given to the visitors at the Castle. — But I cannot help seeming to perceive a confirmation of what I have just hinted at in this story. A high instinct was at work in the case, or I am mistaken. Is it probable that a poor child of that description, with whatever weariness he might be visited, would have ventured, under such a penalty, as he would be taught to expect, to uncover the sheets of a Duke's bed, and deliberately to lay himself down between them, when the rug, or the carpet, presented an obvious couch, still far above his pretensions — is this probable, I would ask, if the great power of nature, which I contend for, had not been manifested within him, prompting to the adventure? Doubtless this young nobleman (for such my mind misgives me that he must be) was allured by some memory, not amounting to full consciousness, of his condition in infancy, when he was used to be lapt by his mother, or his nurse, in just such sheets as he there found, into which he was now but creeping back as into his proper incunabula, and resting-place. — By no other theory, than by this sentiment of a preexistent

state (as I may call it), can I explain a deed so venturous, and, indeed, upon any other system, so indecorous, in this tender, but unseasonable, sleeper.

My pleasant friend JEM WHITE was so impressed with a belief of metamorphoses like this frequently taking place, that in some sort to reverse the wrongs of fortune in these poor changelings, he instituted an annual feast of chimney-sweepers, at which it was his pleasure to officiate as host and waiter. It was a solemn supper held in Smithfield, upon the yearly return of the fair of St. Bartholomew. Cards were issued a week before to the master-sweeps in and about the metropolis, confining the invitation to their younger fry. Now and then an elderly stripling would get in among us, and be good-naturedly winked at; but our main body were infantry. One unfortunate wight, indeed, who, relying upon his dusky suit, had intruded himself into our party, but by tokens was providentially discovered in time to be no chimney-sweeper (all is not soot which looks so), was quoited out of the presence with universal indignation, as not having on the wedding garment; but in general the greatest harmony prevailed. The place chosen was a convenient spot among the pens, at the north side of the fair, not so far distant as to be impervious to the agreeable hubbub of that vanity; but remote enough not to be obvious to the interruption of every gaping spectator in it. The guests assembled about seven. In those little temporary parlours three tables were spread with napery, not so fine as substantial, and at every board a comely hostess presided with her pan of hissing sausages. The nostrils of the young rogues dilated at the savour. JAMES WHITE, as head waiter, had charge of the first table; and myself, with our trusty companion BIGOD, ordinarily ministered to the other two. There was clambering and jostling, you may be sure, who should get at the first table — for Rochester in his maddest days could not have done the humours of the scene with more spirit than my friend. After some general expression of thanks for the honour the company had done him, his inaugural ceremony was to clasp the greasy waist of old dame Ursula (the fattest of the three), that stood frying and fretting, half-blessing, half-cursing "the gentleman," and imprint upon her chaste lips a tender salute, whereas the universal host would set up a shout that tore the concave, while hundreds of grinning teeth startled the night with their brightness. O it was a pleasure to see the sable younkers lick in the unctuous meat, with his more unctuous sayings — how he would fit the tit bits to the puny mouths, reserving the lengthier links for the seniors — how he would intercept a morsel even in the jaws of some young desperado, declaring it "must to the pan again to be browned, for it was not fit for a gentleman's eating"— how he would recommend this slice of white bread, or that piece of kissing-crust, to a tender juvenile, advising them all to have a care of cracking their teeth, which were their best patrimony — how genteelly he would deal about the small ale, as if it were wine, naming the brewer, and protesting, if it were not good, he should lose their custom; with a special recommendation to wipe the lip before drinking. Then we had our toasts — "The King,"— the "Cloth,"— which, whether they understood or not, was equally diverting and

flattering; — and for a crowning sentiment, which never failed, "May the Brush supersede the Laurel!" All these, and fifty other fancies, which were rather felt than comprehended by his guests, would he utter, standing upon tables, and prefacing every sentiment with a "Gentlemen, give me leave to propose so and so," which was a prodigious comfort to those young orphans; every now and then stuffing into his mouth (for it did not do to be squeamish on these occasions) indiscriminate pieces of those reeking sausages, which pleased them mightily, and was the savouriest part, you may believe, of the entertainment.

Golden lads and lasses must.

As chimney-sweepers, come to dust —

JAMES WHITE is extinct, and with him these suppers have long ceased. He carried away with him half the fun of the world when he died — of my world at least. His old clients look for him among the pens; and, missing him, reproach the altered feast of St. Bartholomew, and the glory of Smithfield departed forever.'

Outline of the Essay

Charles Lamb's essay, 'The Praise of Chimney Sweepers' first appeared in the London Magazine in 1822. It was earlier subtitled, *A May Day Effusion*. May Day was called the day of the chimney sweepers; the day of their annual street festival**.**

Lamb makes a very important point in the essay that it is the child chimney sweeper that he particularly likes to meet: 'one of those tender novices, blooming through their first negritude……'.

William Blake had rendered the cry of the chimney sweeper as, 'weep' and Lamb has changed it to 'peep' of the sparrow in this essay. Chimneys were swept at dawn because that was the only time of the day when they were not in use and cool enough to enter.

The child chimney sweeper preaches a lesson of patience to mankind. In his description of chimney sweepers, he gathers the oral tales and literary motifs connected with the child chimney sweeper. Lamb's essays are not in the protest tradition as the poems of William Blake, but Lamb in some of the paragraphs slips into describing the miserable life of the chimney sweepers – 'starving weather', kibes heels', 'raw victims', 'premature apprenticements', etc.

Throughout the essay, there are a number of encounters between the speaker and the sweeper. It is only in the last section of the essay that Lamb is able to join the chimney sweepers in festivity due to his old school friend James White. For a single day, during the time of festivity, these children were treated as if they were citizens of the country.

But in the last paragraph, James White is dead and the suppers for the chimney sweepers have ceased.

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Child Labour in Nineteenth Century Literature

The concept of child labour changed drastically in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century in the type of labour children performed. Increasingly employed in factories and mines, children were thrust into dangerous and unhealthy situations within the adult working world. Romantic and Victorian writers offered sympathetic representations of working children in their poetry and fiction.

In the early part of the nineteenth century, thousands of children in England were employed in mines, textile factories, workshops, usually working for long hours at very low wages. Although the Factory Act of 1833 set the minimum age for children working in factories at nine, it was rarely enforced. Other industries, like the manufacture of glass, lace, pottery, paper, and tobacco, were subject to no regulations at all.

Let us discuss some of the literary figures who had taken initiatives to curb child labour. Robert Southey visited textile factories in the early part of the nineteenth century to take heed of the situation; Samuel Taylor Coleridge authored several pamphlets and letters on child labour; and William Cobbett, addressed the House of Commons, although he appeared to believe the claims of factory owners that British prosperity was dependent on the labor of youngsters. Cobbett reported to the ministers that 'a most surprising discovery has been made, namely, that all our greatness and prosperity,that our superiority over other nations, is owing to 300,000 little girls in Lancashire.'

The plight of the climbing-boys and chimney sweepers captured the imagination and sympathy of authors and reformers. William Blake's famous poem *The Chimney Sweeper* appeared in 1789, and was followed in 1822 by Charles Lamb's essay 'The Praise of Chimney-Sweepers,' wherein Lamb changed their cry from Blake's ''weep, 'weep, 'weep,' to the 'peep peep of a young sparrow,' and referred to the soot-blackened climbers as 'young Africans of our own growth.' Charles Dickens dealt with the horrors of the chimney-sweeping trade in *Oliver Twist* (1838).

Dickens had a unique perspective on the subject of child labour, reflecting upon his own experience working at Warren's Blacking Factory at the age of twelve when his father was held in debtor's prison. Completely on his own, working long hours in rat-infested quarters, young Dickens felt abandoned by his family, and his bitterness over this period of his childhood continued to influence his life and writings. Dickens and several other writers of the period dealt with the black humour and pathos of young factory workers and labourers.

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Check Your Progress

3. Where was the 'The Praise of Chimney Sweepers' first published?
4. What was the minimum age set for children working in factories by the Factory Act of 1833?
5. In which year was William Blake's *The Chimney Sweeper* published?
6. Which work of Charles Dickens deals with the horrors of the chimney-sweeping trade?

9.4 A DISSERTION UPON ROAST PIG

Charles Lamb's enigmatic essay 'A Dissertation Upon Roast Pig' is a worthy read not because it provides us the knowledge of how to roast a pig or the history of roasted pig, but for the pleasure of reading an essay which is written not for 'instruction' but primarily for providing pleasure. Some literary texts are meant only for providing the pleasure of reading and Lamb's personal essays are primarily meant for the same. One reads Lamb in leisure to enjoy the sweet time of engaging oneself in worthy literature.

We need to understand here that the Essay as a genre was primarily thought to be a mode of writing through which the essayists used to disseminate significant information or knowledge to the readers and therefore essays usually tend to have an educative or moralistic value to them. This educative/ instructive aspect of the genre of essay made people term essays to be 'pulpit literature' – literatures primarily with the purpose of instruction. Francis Bacon of the Elizabethan era was a great practitioner of the genre of essays who wrote to educate the readers.

Charles Lamb brought a new freshness to the genre of essays by freeing it from its "pulpit" function to boldly give it not just a personal flavour, but also to spice it up with details which are imaginative, fanciful and often appealing just to the pleasurable sensibilities of the readers than to their education.

The Romantic Age to which Charles Lamb belonged was an age known for its emphasis on emotions than on rationality, to give vent to freedom of personal expression than to follow classical norms of writing, to bring about the commonplace to the fore rather than being bound by certain elitism, to be imaginative and fanciful rather than rational and enumerative, to go beyond the norms of life and society rather than to follow the protocols, to engage the readers in emotional experience than to give them an intellectual sojourn. All the essays in *The Essays of Elia,* the volume in which 'A Dissertation Upon Roast Pig' is included, are written in this new fresh style which made Charles Lamb not just popular in the beginning of the nineteenth century when he was writing these essays, but for all times. He is a writer of all times and not just limited to his specific time.

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All of you probably know the meaning of 'Dissertation' – a dissertation is a piece of organized, formal and researched writing which tends to provide a holistic knowledge about a thing or a process in such a manner that when the reader reads it s/he is able to have a comprehensive overview of the same and feels knowledgeable. The objective of Lamb was never to provide knowledge as the story that is built around the invention of roasted pig is probably as fanciful as it can be. We all have fascinations for narratives – both in constructing them as well as in listening to them. Lamb creates narratives in such a manner that the readers find themselves arrested in the web of his creations as s/he progresses with the narrative. This creative skill of Lamb is not to seen as his lack of scientific and rational reasoning; but it is a means by which Charles Lamb intended to free his readers' minds from the clutches of rational thinking and provide them with a pleasurable sensation which will make them smile at themselves and feel good about the process of reading.

Charles Lamb is not to be taken seriously for the sake of his seriousness in dealing with a subject matter, but in the unusual way of presenting the matter in such a manner that one begins to wish that they had the power to create such significant narrative with common place things such as a roasted pig. Here it is to be remembered that roasted pig is not probably a preferred food for Indians, but it is different in western culture who have different food habits and preferences. So, instead of thinking of our food preferences, when we read 'A Dissertation Upon Roast Pig', we should be aware and conscious of the fascination of the westerners with roasted pig as they find it not just delicious and mouth-watering but also a dish that they crave for.

In the essay 'A Dissertation Upon Roast Pig', the essayist draws attention to this fact and then goes on to enumerate how such a delicious dish is an invention by fluke, by accident. He narrates how the accidental burning of the house where the pig got accidentally burnt was tasted by the son and the father first and led to the discovery of roasted pig in China. Consequently, how the house kept on burning time and again and led to the discovery of the roasted pig by neighbours and then the idea spread like wildfire.

The use of such an interesting anecdote was not meant to give us a history of roasted pig and how the idea was invented, but moreover to provide us with the notion of how great things happen to us by accident and how we all need to be aware and mindful all the time about the wondrous things happening around us.

Check Your Progress

7. What made people to term essays as 'pulpit Literature'?
8. How, according to Lamb, was roast pig discovered in China?

9.5 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Lamb used the pseudonym Elia in his literary works.
2. Charles Lamb is known as the 'Prince among Essayists'.
3. Charles Lamb's essay, 'The Praise of Chimney Sweepers' first appeared in the London Magazine in 1822.
4. The Factory Act of 1833 set the minimum age for children working in factories at nine.
5. William Blake's famous poem '*The Chimney Sweeper'* was first published in 1789.
6. Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* deals with the horrors of the chimney-sweeping trade.
7. The educative/ instructive aspect of the genre of essay made people term essays to be 'pulpit literature' – literatures primarily with the purpose of instruction.
8. Lamb narrates how the accidental burning of the house where the pig got accidentally burnt was tasted by the son and the father first and led to the discovery of roasted pig in China.

9.6 SUMMARY

- Charles Lamb, a well-known literary figure in the nineteenth century, is chiefly remembered for his *Essays of Elia*.
- Lamb used the pseudonym Elia for an essay on the South Sea House, where he had worked decades earlier; Elia was the last name of an Italian man who worked there at the same time as Charles. This was why this name was used by Lamb.
- Charles Lamb, in the essay 'Dream Children', tells us about the children's liking for listening about their elders. The author gives us some idea of his understanding of child psychology. Children always like to listen to facts from the lives of their elders, when they (the elders) were children.
- Lamb, in the essay 'Dream Children', tells the dream children about their great-grandmother Field, Uncle John Lamb, and mother Alice Winterton. Charles Lamb stares at the face of Alice. The dream children grew fainter to his view. Though they spoke nothing yet they appeared to be saying that they were not of Alice, nor of the author. They went to the extent of saying that they were not children at all. They then presented the harsh reality of Lamb's life before him that it was not he, but it was Bartrum, whom the children of Alice would call father.

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- Charles Lamb's essay, 'The Praise of Chimney Sweepers' first appeared in the London Magazine in 1822. It was earlier subtitled, A May Day Effusion. May Day was called the day of the chimney sweepers; the day of their annual street festival.
- Charles Lamb gathered the oral tales and literary motifs connected with the child chimney sweeper in the essay 'The Praise of Chimney Sweepers'. Lamb's essays are not in the protest tradition as the poems of William Blake, but Lamb in some of the paragraphs slips into describing the miserable life of the chimney sweepers – 'starving weather', kibes heels', 'raw victims', 'premature apprenticements', etc.
- It is only in the last section of the essay 'The Praise of Chimney Sweepers' that Lamb is able to join the chimney sweepers in festivity due to his old school friend James White. For a single day, during the time of festivity, these children were treated as if they were citizens of the country. But in the last paragraph, James White is dead and the suppers for the chimney sweepers have ceased.
- In the late eighteenth and nineteenth century, children were thrust into dangerous and unhealthy situations within the adult working world. Although the Factory Act of 1833 set the minimum age for children working in factories at nine, it was rarely enforced. Other industries, like the manufacture of glass, lace, pottery, paper, and tobacco, were subject to no regulations at all.
- Charles Lamb brought a new freshness to the genre of essays by freeing it from its "pulpit" function to boldly give it not just a personal flavour, but also to spice it up with details which are imaginative, fanciful and often appealing just to the pleasurable sensibilities of the readers than to their education.
- This creative skill of Lamb is not to seen as his lack of scientific and rational reasoning; but it is a means by which Charles Lamb intended to free his readers' minds from the clutches of rational thinking and provide them with a pleasurable sensation which will make them smile at themselves and feel good about the process of reading.
- The use of such an interesting anecdote was not meant to give us a history of roasted pig and how the idea was invented, but moreover to provide us with the notion of how great things happen to us by accident and how we all need to be aware and mindful all the time about the wondrous things happening around us.

9.7 KEY WORDS

- **Wit:** It is a literary device that is aimed at mocking the foibles and follies of society. It is the use of words or ideas in an amusing, clever, and imaginative way.

- **Irony:** It is a literary device that exposes the incongruity or contrast between the expectation of the situation and the reality.
- **Pseudonym:** It is a fictitious name used by an author to hide their identity.
- **Pamphlets:** It is an unbounded printed publication that focuses on a particular subject.

9.8 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on the element of humour in 'Dream Children'.
2. How does Charles Lamb's description of chimney sweeper differ from that of William Blake?
3. How did the nineteenth century writers tackle the subject of child labour in their writings?
4. What is a dissertation?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Discuss Charles Lamb's understanding of child-psychology in 'Dream Children: A Reverie'.
2. Analyze the autobiographical elements in 'Dream Children'.
3. Examine Charles Lamb's treatment of child labour in 'The Praise of the Chimney Sweepers'.
4. Discuss the key aspects which the Romantic Age emphasized.

9.9 FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 10 THOMAS CARLYLE

NOTES

Structure

10.0 Introduction
10.1 Objectives
10.2 Hero as Poet: Shakespeare and Dante
10.3 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
10.4 Summary
10.5 Key Words
10.6 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
10.7 Further Readings

10.0 INTRODUCTION

Scottish historian Thomas Carlyle was an influential critic of the early Victorian England. In his writings, he often tackled contentious subjects. He was extremely popular for his satirical literary works. Writers like Charles Dickens were inspired by his works and ideas. In the essay 'Hero as Poet: Shakespeare and Dante', Carlyle compares the so-called historical figures who are deemed as heroes with the literary figures who should actually be regarded as heroes. In this regard, he talks about the exemplary contributions of Dante Alighieri and William Shakespeare. These two poets left an indelible impact on the literary world without causing any devastation and destruction. It is for this reason that Carlyle believes that literary figures should be hero-worshipped.

10.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Examine the literary contribution of Thomas Carlyle
- Discuss in detail 'Hero as Poet: Shakespeare and Dante'

10.2 HERO AS POET: SHAKESPEARE AND DANTE

Thomas Carlyle was born on 4 December 1795 at Ecclefechan, Dumfrieeshire in Scotland. He was an essayist, philosopher, mathematician, teacher and historian. Apart from these roles, Carlyle also worked as a translator. Thomas Carlyle's primary style of writing was pure satire. As a professor, Thomas Carlyle had given many lectures, and after one such lecture, he had written *On Heroes*, *Hero-worship, and the Heroic History*. It was in this work that Carlyle claimed that history of the world, as people know it, is only a chronicle of the lives of the so-called great men in history.

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In the year 1837, Thomas Carlyle wrote *The French Revolution: A History*. This book turned out to be so revolutionary, that it later inspired Charles Dickens to write his famous novel *A Tale of Two Cities* in 1859. Thomas Carlyle also contributed to the Edinburgh Encyclopedia regularly. In the year 1849, Carlyle published a controversial article titled 'Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question'. Thomas Carlyle returned to the University of Edinburgh between 1819 and 1821, during which he went through a period of crisis in faith. This experience resulted in his work *Sartor Resartus*, translated to *The Tailor Retailored*. This work plummeted him to instant recognition.

Thomas Carlyle married Jane Welsh who was herself a famous literary figure. However, this marriage did not seem to deter him from forming other liaisons. The most notable among them were with Margaret Kirkpatrick, the daughter of a British official, and with an Indian princess. The relationship with the Indian princess did not turn into marriage because of the prevalent social circumstances in India at the time.

Summary of the Essay

Thomas Carlyle was a Scottish essayist, lecturer and historian. The essay titled 'Hero as Poet: Shakespeare and Dante' had been the content of one of his lectures. The central theme of this lecture had been the reverence and respect that both Dante and William Shakespeare had earned through their works. While Thomas Carlyle believed that both Dante and William Shakespeare had earned the status of heroes, heroes in actual history were actually anything but heroes. Thomas Carlyle believed that Dante had been the father of the Italian language, and in that capacity needed to be placed on a pedestal, and William Shakespeare had earned the same status during the modern ages. This spoke volumes for the quality and content of the work produced by both Dante and Shakespeare. As a historian, Thomas Carlyle believed that figures in history did not qualify to be called heroes. Carlyle believed that literary figures deserved to be known as heroes, because they had contributed to the literary history of their nations, and had not harmed anyone. On the contrary, figures in history did not deserve to be categorized as heroes, because there had been much bloodshed, destruction and devastation because of them.

Theme

The central theme of this essay is the comparison of the works of Dante and Shakespeare, and the suggestion that both Dante and William Shakespeare should be placed on a pedestal. Thomas Carlyle had essayed multiple roles, and besides being a renowned essayist and historian himself, he had also been a teacher or lecturer.

As a historian, Thomas Carlyle had concluded and opined that figures in history who the world considered heroes had done nothing to deserve and receive that hero-worship. Carlyle was convinced that the real heroes of this world were

poets and literary figures such as Dante and Shakespeare. While Dante is known to this day as the father of the Italian language, William Shakespeare had put English on the world map as a language of poets of the modern ages.

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Critical Appreciation

Thomas Carlyle had apparently liked the concept of heroes, especially heroes in real life and heroes who had leadership qualities. In his book titled *On Heroes, Hero-worship, and the Heroic in History*, Thomas Carlyle had lamented the fact that the history of the world had no real heroes, or men and women who could be hero worshipped.

According to Thomas Carlyle, the actions of men and women made them heroes. These men and women were worthy of being hero-worshipped. Like most people, Thomas Carlyle too appears to have looked for people who he could hero-worship and place on a pedestal. The essayist appears to have been disappointed with the fact that history of the world, as the world knows it, has produced only a few real heroes.

On the other hand, while speaking of both Dante Alighieri and William Shakespeare, during one of his lectures, Thomas Carlyle spoke very highly of both of them. According to Carlyle, Dante Alighieri had been the Father of the Italian language. He contributed to the development and placement of the Italian language on the world map during the middle ages. In the same vein, Carlyle spoke very highly of the English poet William Shakespeare. According to Carlyle, the English poet, through his poetry, had managed to put English on the world map in the modern ages. Thomas Carlyle, during the lecture, opined that through his poetry, William Shakespeare had earned the same status as Homer and Dante Alighieri. Carlyle said that what Homer had been to Greece, and Dante Alighieri to Italy, William Shakespeare had been to England.

Thomas Carlyle said that the 'sovereign' English poet William Shakespeare with his 'perennial singing voice' and his 'seeing eye' had been assigned the job of recording the changing times across Europe. Thomas Carlyle was of the view that the world today recognizes and identifies William Shakespeare as a poet precisely because of his poetic brilliance. It appears as though Thomas Carlyle never ran out of superlatives while eulogizing William Shakespeare as a poet. He used words such as 'placid of joyous strength', 'true and clear, like a tranquil, unfathomable sea', 'priceless', 'calmness of depth', and 'a great soul' to describe Shakespeare.

Thomas Carlyle compared William Shakespeare to a tranquil, immaculately built house,that makes people forget the rude and disorderly quarry that it had originally been built from. Carlyle believed that William Shakespeare was such a fine human being that people could just read his poetry to be able to forget the troubles of this world. It is a known fact that the true nature and quality of writers and artists are revealed in their works. In that context, the poetry of William Shakespeare is truly calming and inspiring to his audience even to this day and

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generation. This, according to Carlyle suggested that Shakespeare was a man of great strength of character and depth of knowledge which helped him earn his position on the same pedestal as Homer and Dante Alighieri.

Thomas Carlyle was a romantic personality. He abhorred violence and cruelty displayed by so called 'heroic' figures in history. These figures were hero-worshipped for their actions, which had actually caused destruction and devastation. Perhaps Carlyle had thought that people such as Dante Alighieri and William Shakespeare were true heroes rather than the so-called heroic figures in history, because they had contributed to the growth and development of their nations and their national languages.

Creative work usually manages to soothe and calm people. The poetry of William Shakespeare too is gentle, romantic, inspiring, and offers hope and joy to the readers. His poetry suggests that love has the power to conquer all kinds of brutalities. The poetry of William Shakespeare helps his audience believe that true love actually exists, and that all of us can find true love.

Issues and Analysis

In his essay titled 'Hero as Poet: Shakespeare and Dante', Thomas Carlyle has compared both Dante and Shakespeare to Homer, putting all three of them on the same pedestal. Carlyle felt that true love is represented by human characteristics such as calmness and placidity of nature and strength of character, depth of thinking, and so on. Thomas Carlyle had himself been a very romantic person, who believed that marriage need not stop a person from seeking and finding love beyond that relationship.

In his personal life, too, Thomas Carlyle had found romance and love more than once beyond marriage. The most famous of his romantic liaisons had been with an Indian princess. In fact, he had even wanted to marry this Indian princess. William Dalrymple, commenting on this liaison, said that his feelings had been reciprocated, but the couple was unable to marry because of the social environment and circumstances prevalent in India during those times.

Carlyle's romantic nature had contributed to this eulogy of William Shakespeare as a poet. While recording the changing times across Europe, William Shakespeare had seen only the love and romance that had survived and prevailed. His 'seeing eye' had refused to see the destruction, the hopelessness and sorrow, the anguish and depression. Instead, the great poet William Shakespeare had been able to see only love, romance, hope and pride. William Shakespeare had been able to see only the possibility of progress and development, the survival of true love against all odds and obstacles.

Thomas Carlyle claimed that intellectual and scientific essays and articles by scientists like Sir Francis Bacon would appear earthly when compared to the poetry of William Shakespeare. This could be taken to imply that William

Shakespeare's poetry is more divine than of this world. Throughout the essay, Caryle appears entirely unable to control his hero worship for Dante and Shakespeare.

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According to Thomas Carlyle, William Shakespeare had more virtue than even he possibly was aware of. He believed that the greatest skill that William Shakespeare possessed, was his ability to connect and combine the intellect with the moral characteristic of man. Thomas Carlyle has referred to this, in his essay, as having been Shakespeare's 'unconscious intellect'.

In his lecture on this topic, Thomas Carlyle had quoted Novalis, who had rightfully asserted that 'those dramas of his are products of nature too, as deep as nature as himself'. Thomas Carlyle believes that the creative work of William Shakespeare had been drawn from the depth of his heart, his nature, and so it shone from the depth of that pure nature. According to Carlyle, William Shakespeare's art did not have artificiality about it. This means Carlyle had believed that William Shakespeare had possessed such purity that it had automatically been reflected in all of his work. But this is true of all creative and artistic people. All of their work reflects, at the end of the day, the artist's true nature and intentions.

Historical Background

The essay titled 'Hero as Poet: Shakespeare and Dante' was first delivered as lecture. This lecture had first been delivered on 12 May 1840.

According to Thomas Carlyle, in old times, people used to consider prophets as their heroes, and worshipped them. Carlyle believed that all human beings actually thrived on their need to hero-worship someone. When people hero-worship someone, the object of their hero-worship is obviously another human being, who possess certain qualities that they are not endowed with. The object of that hero-worship is someone they can see, who is living, and of this earth. In his lecture, he stressed that in old times, people usually hero-worshipped the Divinity, or the prophets, because the prophets represented the God they were not able to see or interact with. Slowly and gradually, people started hero-worshipping people.

Thomas Carlyle believed that poets belonged to all ages. While the prophets and heroes in history had only belonged to their own ages because of their questionable actions, poets that had produced works belonged to all generations. This was because people from future generations could also benefit from their works. According to Carlyle, poets were created and nurtured by nature, shaped by nature so entirely, that their souls and their hearts had been born of nature, shaped by nature, pristine, pure and virtuous.

The background to this essay, therefore, appeared to have been Thomas Carlyle's own conviction that poets belonged to nature. Yet Carlyle believed that the poets such as Dante and Shakespeare had been so in tune with nature, that they themselves had been entirely unaware of that bonding with nature. Thomas

Carlyle believed that poets such as Shakespeare and Dante had possessed nature's heart and soul, pure and virtuous, but the purity and virtuousity had been hidden from them. That purity and virtuousity of soul and heart had shaped their creativity and art, and they had been so engrossed in that creativity and art that they had probably never stopped to think about what theY create at all.

NOTES

Check Your Progress

1. Which work of Thomas Carlyle inspired Charles Dickens to write *A Tale of Two Cities*?
2. Name the controversial article published by Carlyle in 1849.
3. Which work of Carlyle brought him instant recognition?
4. What are some of the superlatives used by Carlyle to describe Shakespeare?
5. When was the lecture 'Hero as Poet: Shakespeare and Dante' first delivered?

10.3 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Thomas Carlyle's *The French Revolution: A History* inspired Charles Dickens to write his famous novel *A Tale of Two Cities* in 1859.
2. In the year 1849, Carlyle published a controversial article titled 'Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question'.
3. Thomas Carlyle's work *Sartor Resartus*, translated to *The Tailor Retailored,* plummeted him to instant recognition.
4. Thomas Carlyle never ran out of superlatives while eulogizing William Shakespeare as a poet. He used words such as 'placid of joyous strength', 'true and clear, like a tranquil, unfathomable sea', 'priceless', 'calmness of depth', and 'a great soul' to describe Shakespeare.
5. The essay titled 'Hero as Poet: Shakespeare and Dante' was first delivered as lecture on 12 May 1840.

10.4 SUMMARY

- Thomas Carlyle was an essayist, philosopher, mathematician, teacher and historian. Apart from these roles, Carlyle also worked as a translator.
- Thomas Carlyle had given many lectures, and after one such lecture, he had written *On Heroes*, *Hero-worship*, *and the Heroic History*. It was in this work that Carlyle claimed that history of the world, as people know it, is only a chronicle of the lives of the so-called great men in history.

NOTES

- Thomas Carlyle was a Scottish essayist, lecturer and historian. The essay titled 'Hero as Poet: Shakespeare and Dante' had been the content of one of his lectures. The central theme of this lecture had been the reverence and respect that both Dante and William Shakespeare had earned through their works.
- While Thomas Carlyle believed that both Dante and William Shakespeare had earned the status of heroes, heroes in actual history were actually anything but heroes.
- Carlyle believed that literary figures deserved to be known as heroes, because they had contributed to the literary history of their nations, and had not harmed anyone. On the contrary, figures in history did not deserve to be categorized as heroes, because there had been much bloodshed, destruction and devastation because of them.
- According to Carlyle, Dante Alighieri had been the Father of the Italian language. He contributed to the development and placement of the Italian language on the world map during the middle ages. In the same vein, Carlyle spoke very highly of the English poet William Shakespeare. According to Carlyle,the English poet, through his poetry, had managed to put English on the world map in the modern ages.
- In the essay titled 'Hero as Poet: Shakespeare and Dante', Thomas Carlyle has compared both Dante and Shakespeare to Homer, putting all three of them on the same pedestal.
- According to Thomas Carlyle, William Shakespeare had more virtue than even he possibly was aware of. He believed that the greatest skill that William Shakespeare possessed, was his ability to connect and combine the intellect with the moral characteristic of man. Thomas Carlyle has referred to this, in his essay, as having been Shakespeare's 'unconscious intellect'.

10.5 KEY WORDS

- **Satire:** It is the use of humour to ridicule or deride the vices, follies and foibles of people or society as a whole.
- **Discourse:** It is a formal discussion of a serious subject in speech or in writing.
- **Lecture:** It is a talk that is delivered in front of a large group in order to teach them about a particular topic.

10.6 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

NOTES

Short-Answer Questions

1. What are some of the prominent works written by Thomas Carlyle
2. Why, according to Carlyle, should poets be worshipped as heroes?
3. Write a short note on Shakespeare's 'unconscious intellect'.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Analyze the contribution of Dante and Shakespeare as poets.
2. Discuss the central theme of 'Hero as a Poet: Shakespeare and Dante'.

10.7 FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 11 JOHN RUSKIN

NOTES

Structure

11.0 Introduction
11.1 Objectives
11.2 Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies*
11.3 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
11.4 Summary
11.5 Key Words
11.6 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
11.7 Further Readings

11.0 INTRODUCTION

John Ruskin, a Victorian to the core, in his famous book *Sesame and Lilies* dealt with issues of how good books are treasures and what kind of education women should get. Ruskin opens the book by talking about the ambiguity that the title has. The book is divided into two parts and deals with the significance of great books/ literature in the first section 'Of Kings' Treasuries'. The second part of the book "Of Queen's Gardens" deals with the role of women in Victorian England as well as their education. The book *Sesame and Lilies* apparently is a popular book which talks about the popular notions of the Victorian society, but it is also at the same time, a very orthodox document as far as women's issues are concerned as it presents women and their education from a very male chauvinist point of view.

11.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss John Ruskin's early life and writing style
- Describe the beliefs and changes that took place in the Victorian Age
- Analyze Ruskin's poem *Sesame and Lilies*

11.2 RUSKIN'S *SESAME AND LILIES*

John Ruskin, born in London, in 1819, was the son of a very prosperous wine merchant who gained a fortune in trade. Therefore, he had the luxury of spending long hours in with good books and pictures. Of Ruskin's early years at Herne Hill, on the outskirts of London, it is better to read his own interesting record in *Praeterita*. Ruskin entered Christ Church College, Oxford, in 1836, when only seventeen years old.

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A Volume of poems which had illustrations by the poet himself was published in 1859. It was his volume of poems which gave him some fame; but it was his essays and his prose writings for which he is known today. His first volume of *Modern Painters* appeared in 1843. He wrote other books — *Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849), *Stones of Venice* (1851-1853), Pre-Raphaelitism, and numerous lectures and essays, which gave him a place in the world of art similar to that held by Matthew Arnold in the world of letters. In 1869, he was appointed professor of art at Oxford, a position which greatly increased his prestige and influence, not only among students but among a great variety of people who heard his lectures and read his published works. *Lectures on Art*, *Aratra Pentelici* (lectures on sculpture),*Ariadne Florentina* (lectures on engraving), *Michael Angela and Tintoret*, *The Art of England*, *Vald' Arno*(lectures on Tuscan art), *St. Mark's Rest* (a history of Venice), *Mornings in Florence* (studies in Christian art, now much used as a guidebook to the picture galleries of Florence), *The Laws of Fiesole* (a treatise on drawing and painting for schools), *Academy of Fine Arts in Venice*, *Pleasures of England*,—all these works on art show Ruskin's literary industry. And we must also record *Love's Meinie* (a study of birds), *Proserpina* (a study of flowers), *Deucalion* (a study of waves and stones) besides various essays on political economy which indicate that Ruskin, like Arnold, had begun to consider the practical problems of his age.

John Ruskin then published the essays in book form, which was titled as *Unto This Last*. It was published in 1862. *Munera Pulveris*, another work of much significance, dealt with the principles of capital and labor and the evils of the competitive system, which were discussed in such a way that the author was denounced as a visionary or a madman. It was also published in 1862. The other works of this period which are of extreme significance in understanding the Victorian ethos are *Time and Tide*, *Fors Clavigera*, *Sesame and Lilies*, and the *Crown of Wild Olive*.

The Cultural Background to the Age – The Victorian Age

The Victorian age starts from **1837** and it carries on till **1900/ 1901**. The age is called so, as Queen Victoria was ruling during this period of time. Queen Victoria ascended the British Throne in 1837 and ruled England till 1901 when she died. Her ascension to the British Throne till her death in 1901 is usually considered to be the Victorian Age. This age saw the growth of novel as a primary mode of expression of the literary artists, though there are distinguished poets like Browning, Tennyson, and the Rossettis writing poems. But there is a lack of drama in the Victorian Age.

It is essential to know the philosophical and the social background in which different writers of this age wrote as major socio-economic and political forces ***(Democracy, Individualism, Industrialism, Imperialism, Rationalism and Science)*** and their complex interaction with culture, life and beliefs affected life, literature and thought in many ways.

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The age was dominated by the ***Utilitarian Theories*** – those of **Jeremy Bentham** and **John Stuart Mill**. The Theory of Utilitarianism propounded that the dominant striving factor of an individual's life is to attain as much pleasure as possible – to *maximize pleasure and to minimize pain*. Bentham is the first one to provide two principles that should govern an individual's life, which is known as Bentham's Deontology –

- The first law of nature is to wish our own happiness.
- Seek our own happiness in the happiness of others.

Bentham's Theory of Utilitarianism not only talks about striving for the principle of pleasure but also focuses on the societal aspect when in the second principle, he tries to focus on societal pleasure. Therefore, apart from the intensity, duration, certainty/uncertainty, nearness/ remoteness, fecundity or fruitfulness, purity (not to be followed by painful experience); the extent of the pleasure (that is, how many people are enjoying or participating or benefiting from that pleasure) becomes an important aspect in Bentham Theory of Utilitarianism.

But the problem with Bentham's Deontology is that the first principle talks about the basic instinct of any human being whereas the second one talks about the social duty of a rational human being. Thus, the second principle makes man aware of their social duties. This dichotomy makes it clear that when the first principle was made to be the basis for leading lives in industrial England, the second principle of Bentham was heavily undermined in the practice of Utilitarianism. **Carlyle commented on Bentham that 'he has the completeness of the incomplete man.'**

After Bentham, John Stuart Mill talked about the utilitarianism where he tried to talk about the quality of pleasure. He says – **'it is better to be a Socrates dissatisfied than to be a fool satisfied.'** Mill talked about higher and lower pleasures and said that which pleasure is higher can only be judged by an experienced person.

Apart from the Utilitarian theories, this age also saw significant scientific progress which was a result of the constant effort of the eighteenth and nineteenth century's engagement with the scientific rationality and experiments. The age was ornamented with an extensive amount of scientific writing along with the new technologies.

We are, first of all, trying to focus on the newer technologies that paved the path for Industrialism in England and the consequent Imperialistic tendencies. It not that capitalism was a new thing in Europe in the nineteenth century. The advent of Capitalism started in the sixteenth century. But the capitalistic tendencies began to show their full impact from the Victorian period onwards, when the entrepreneurs took up the newer technologies to set up industries in the urban centers of England. Large numbers of people from the rural England started flocking together in town with the hopes that somehow this industrialism will change their fate and will make them live a more luxurious life. But the industrial urban life created a new ethos –

where every relationship became a deal and money became an end in itself, where love and affection were replaced by indifference; and power and action became the desirable social virtues. Thus, the Industrial revolution made Britain prosperous in scientific and monetary terms, but that also led to the dehumanization process in England. The British literature of the Victorian era obviously dealt with all these.

The key words that dominated this era are:

(i) Assertion : implying negation

(ii) Expansion : implying oppression

(iii) Imitation : implying devaluation

But the more important factor that became a major concern of the literary writing is the question of faith and doubt. In the history of England, it was the age where the existence of God was questioned for the first time. In the earlier age (Romantic Age), the Romantic Poets came to be identified for their rebelliousness, and they championed all the mythical rebellious figures. Till the Victorian age, no one has had the courage to question the very existence of God. P. B. Shelley's *The Revolt of Islam* is considered, by some literary critics, as a text which sometimes does put the question forward, but not in vehement terms. It's only in the Victorian age that the scientific, rational spirit of the age made the question of the existence of God a pertinent one and we see many writings to be revolving around the question of faith and doubt.

We see the Utilitarian theory trying to substitute the word 'suffering' with 'pleasure'. Whereas earlier it was thought that if a person repents for the original sin and suffers for that then he/she has a chance to achieve salvation. But the utilitarian theorists try to present it in a completely opposite way when they talk about the fact that the primary objective of one's life should be to accumulate as much pleasure as one can and also try to decrease as much sufferings and pains as possible.

Not only the Utilitarian theorists but the scholars from other subjects like Biology (**Charles Darwin** came up with the theory of evolution of man in ***Origin Of Species*** **and** ***Descent of Man*****. The theory stated** that man is a biological product who has come into being in the process of evolution, and is not a divine product as the Bible proclaims. In the field of Geology, **Charles Lyell**, the famous geologist of the age proves **that earth is much older than what The Bible proclaims it to be**. These two also tried their best to disapprove the authority of the Bible and to question God. Thus one of the prime concerns of the Victorian scholars was the matter of faith and doubt, the other being the utilitarian philosophy which created a stir in the minds of the people who thought about the socialistic trends as the Marxian thought also dominated the nineteenth century.

Summary and Critical Appreciation of *Sesame and Lilies*

Victorian Society was a highly moralistic one and had such strong views about morals and high notion of culture that many writers of the age were preoccupied

with the notions of how to make their readers more and more cultured so as to enable progress of the British nation. We all know that Victorian age was a time when scientific progress led to industrialization of England, leading to mercantile expansion, colonialism being the policy of the British nation. In that context, John Ruskin's book *Sesame and Lilies* is a type of conduct book for men and women and how they should educate themselves to find their place in society.

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The first part of the book deals with 'Of Kings' Treasuries'. By 'Of Kings' Treasuries', Ruskin refers to the good literature that has been written as good books are thought to be real treasures. They are the most valuable instruments which help in the development of man – reading good books not only provides pleasure but also enlarges one's mind, making the person aware of the real world in a better manner. Books are not just material things, but they are the output of the best minds as brilliant authors pour their being and soul into the books which can be the most significant way of intellectual development. It is to be understood that books are a way not only of enriching the minds, but such enrichment leads to a better society as the ideas inherent in the books can be better used for the development of society. To go beyond the book '*Sesame and Lilies*', we can think of the way how, before Ruskin, the romantic poet P. B. Shelley wrote "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.' The poets or writers are called legislators as they always dream and represent a vision of a better society in their works. It is therefore very apt on part of Ruskin to think and speak in terms of books being 'Of Kings' Treasuries'.

Next, John Ruskin goes into a discussion of the education system which has been a matter of debate in many literary texts and many scholars of the day were prominent thinkers and critics of Victorian education system. It is a common knowledge that the Victorian education was becoming more and more utilitarian in nature following the utilitarian theories developed by Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. The Utilitarian education emphasized more on materialistic learning – learning of facts and figures; and it gave less primacy to imagination and critical thinking. It was thought that if the education system harps on facts and figures then it will lead to materialistic advancement. But many Victorian writers and scholars felt that such approach was very narrow as it makes one lose sight of the morality and humanity which should be the basis of education and thus heavily reprimanded it. Ruskin too was of this opinion and thought that materialistic education is something which does not allow love and humanity to develop and thus are not very useful in making human beings complete individuals.

Ruskin goes onto describe books as man's best friend that acts as a teacher and companion. Ruskin talks about four kinds of books -

(i) Good books of the hour
(ii) Good books for all life
(iii) Bad books of the hour
(iv) Bad books for all life

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Good books of the hour are the ones which contain enlightened talks of people of eminence and they can be in the form of travelogues or even novels. According to John Ruskin, great authors, statesmen, philosophers and thinkers write books for all life and we must read these books to enter into the thought processes of these writers and experience their sublime thoughts. In these kinds of books, much elevated thoughts are discussed and therefore, one should read them carefully in order to fathom their significance for our lives, society and humanity.

Next, Ruskin talks about how there is a need for educated men to have a knowledge of a number of different languages. They should be aware of different words and their origins as English is a mongrel language and often very deceptive. It is not that an educated man should know everything, but he should have a minimum knowledge of languages so that he is aware of the origin and meaning of words. He even recommends Max Muller's *The Science of Language* to his readers so that they know their English better.

Thereafter Ruskin goes into a discussion of John Milton's *Lycidas* as he considers Milton to be a great poet and through Milton, he wants to educate the common minds as they need to be uplifted with the greatness and sublimity of Milton. According to Ruskin, common people lack culture and thus, their filthy ideas need to be rooted out to fill them with great ideas which can be done by writers like Milton. Ruskin feels that great writers can ignite the passion in people to do good things. Here, Ruskin uses passion in a positive way and says that English men should be passionate about their books rather than their horses. What he means is that the English men should find themselves cultured if they read books rather than buying better horses.

Then Ruskin goes on to criticize the English people as he thinks that utilitarian philosophy has made the English minds such that they despise science and are far behind other European nations. Ruskin even critiques Englishmen for destroying nature for the sake of racecourses. By making such a critique, he wants to raise the cultural standards of the English men and he feels that it can be done by the literature as any nation which has a rich tradition of literature is a rich nation. And he concludes by saying that the role of a king should be that of promoting literature as that would enrich the nation and make people much cultured. With this, he comes to the end of the first part of the book 'Of King's Treasuries'.

The second part of the book is named 'Of Queens' Gardens.' In this section, Ruskin focuses on women as against his focus on men in the first section of the book. What is illuminating is the fact that he talks about women's education. Before this, Rosseau and Mary Wollstonecraft had written significantly on women's education. While Rosseau did not make much effort to provide rational education to women, Mary Wollstonecraft, the first feminist theoretician in England, asked women to submit to reason and not to men and to do so with the aid of education. Though Ruskin also talks about women's education, he was not so much liked for his views as they are typically representative of Victorian moral education which instead of freeing women, made them submissive to patriarchy.

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Ruskin states that the aim of education should be to liberate the minds and thus good books should be read by women so that they can broaden their horizons. However, he does not talk about what women should read and how that will lead to the opening up of the minds.

Next, John Ruskin talks about women in literature where he starts with the premise that Shakespeare is said to have no heroes but only heroines. Othello, Hamlet, Julius Ceaser, Merchant and Orlando are all weaker than Desdemona, Cordelia, Isabella, Portia and Rosalind. According to Ruskin, tragedy happens to the heroes as they commit some fatal mistakes. Shakespeare's women are clever and intelligent. Among Shakespeare's women Ophelia is weak and Lady Macbeth, Regan and Goneril are wicked. Thus, according to Ruskin, Shakespeare views women to be more capable than men. He also quotes women characters from other literary sources such as Walter Scott, Dante and Chaucer and further states that Women are, in general, very real in literature.

Regarding women's role within the realms of the home, it seems that John Ruskin feels that it is not wise to think that men are always wiser and correct, and women are not always dolls. Often women play like dolls and encourage their lovers as they passionately love them and want to be their inspiration. They do it out of their sense of duty for men. They feel that in marrying their husband they get eternally bound to their husband. Ruskin feels that women maintain peace and good atmosphere within the home. But by giving such roles to women he is defining the gender roles which are very patriarchal as he seems to believe that women are and should be confined to their homes. In saying so, he is reflecting the Victorian mindset, according to which, women were always expected to be submissive to men and to look after his households. Thus, Ruskin initially praises women to place them at the helm of the affairs only to get them to their traditional roles of being nothing more than home makers and mothers.

Next Ruskin talks about women's education and states that physical training is necessary for women as they should gain good health and beauty by which he means that if women are beautiful and healthy, then can be desirous objects to men, and can live a better life. Ruskin could not think of women as thinking and desiring individuals who could live a life of their own. He always thinks and speaks of women in relation to men which shows his deeply patriarchal attitude. Again, he continues to extoll women as he says that women should have these three characteristics:

(a) physical beauty,

(b) natural instinct of justice and

(c) natural tact of love.

This again is very problematic as he is thinking of women as beings who should grow up and prepare themselves to be subservient to men.

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Ruskin says that women should read history and avoid theology as it makes them superstitious. She should acquire knowledge in general and should not read much of literature, romantic novels and poetry as these make them believe in falsehoods which shows that he thinks that women do not have critical, judgmental or intellectual power to judge what is false and what is true. Music should be taught to women as it makes them pleasurable He considers women to be within the home, looking after the home. In other words, it can be said that Ruskin is providing a very biased account of women and being a typical Victorian male could not think beyond his own privilege. Women, for John Ruskin, seem to be a plaything for men and that is why he prescribes an education for women which makes them pleasurable to men and also can make them act as their servants.

Check Your Progress

1. What did *Munera Pulveris* deal with?
2. What did the Theory of Utilitarianism propound?
3. What is the problem with Bentham's Deontology?
4. What did Charles Darwin's theory state?
5. Which three characteristics, according to Ruskin, should women have?

11.3 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. *Munera Pulveris* dealt with the principles of capital and labor and the evils of the competitive system.
2. The Theory of Utilitarianism propounded that the dominant striving factor of an individual's life is to attain as much pleasure as possible – to *maximize pleasure and to minimize pain*.
3. The problem with Bentham's Deontology is that the first principle talks about the basic instinct of any human being whereas the second one talks about the social duty of a rational human being.
4. Charles Darwin's theory stated that man is a biological product who has come into being in the process of evolution, and is not a divine product as the Bible proclaims.
5. According to Ruskin, women should have these three characteristics:
   (a) physical beauty,
   (b natural instinct of justice and
   (c) natural tact of love.

11.4 SUMMARY

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- His first volume of *Modern Painters* appeared in 1843. He wrote other books — *Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849), *Stones of Venice* (1851-1853), Pre-Raphaelitism, and numerous lectures and essays, which gave him a place in the world of art similar to that held by Matthew Arnold in the world of letters.
- The Victorian Age saw the growth of novel as a primary mode of expression of the literary artists, though there are distinguished poets like Browning, Tennyson, and the Rossettis writing poems. But there is a lack of drama in the Victorian Age.
- The age was dominated by the ***Utilitarian Theories*** – those of **Jeremy Bentham** and **John Stuart Mill**. The Theory of Utilitarianism propounded that the dominant striving factor of an individual's life is to attain as much pleasure as possible – to *maximize pleasure and to minimize pain*.
- Apart from the Utilitarian theories, this age also saw significant scientific progress which was a result of the constant effort of the eighteenth and nineteenth century's engagement with the scientific rationality and experiments.
- But the more important factor that became a major concern of the literary writing is the question of faith and doubt. In the history of England, it was the age where the existence of God was questioned for the first time.
- In the field of Geology, Charles Lyell, the famous geologist of the age proves that earth is much older than what The Bible proclaims it to be.
- The first part of the book *Sesame and Lilies* deals with 'Of Kings' Treasuries'. By 'Of Kings' Treasuries', Ruskin refers to the good literature that has been written as good books are thought to be real treasures
- The Utilitarian education emphasized more on materialistic learning – learning of facts and figures; and it gave less primacy to imagination and critical thinking.
- According to John Ruskin, great authors, statesmen, philosophers and thinkers write books for all life and we must read these books to enter into the thought processes of these writers and experience their sublime thoughts.
- The second part of the book is named 'Of Queens' Gardens.' In this section, Ruskin focuses on women as against his focus on men in the first section of the book. What is illuminating is the fact that he talks about women's education.

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- Ruskin talks about women's education and states that physical training is necessary for women as they should gain good health and beauty by which he means that if women are beautiful and healthy, then can be desirous objects to men, and can live a better life.
- Women, for John Ruskin, seem to be a plaything for men and that is why he prescribes an education for women which makes them pleasurable to men and also can make them act as their servants.

11.5 KEY WORDS

- **Victorian Literature**: It refers to English literature during the reign of Queen Victoria. English writing from this era reflects the major transformation in most aspects of English life, such as significant scientific, economic, and technological advances to changes in class structures and the role of religion in society.
- **Theory of Utilitarianism:** It is a theory of morality, which advocates actions that foster happiness or pleasure and opposes actions that cause unhappiness or harm.

11.6 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. State some of the lectures given by Ruskin at Oxford.
2. List the two principles of Bentham's Deontology.
3. What are the key words that dominated the industrial era?
4. What are 'good books of the hour'?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Discuss the advent and effects if industrialization in England.
2. Describe the contents of the first part of the book *Sesame and Lilies.*

11.7 FURTHER READINGS

Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar. 1979. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*. New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press.

Ruskin, John. *The Diaries of John Ruskin*. 1959. 3 vols. Ed. Joan Evans and John Howard Whitehouse. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

BLOCK - IV

FICTION

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UNIT 12 JANE AUSTEN

Structure

12.0 Introduction
12.1 Objectives
12.2 Jane Austen: Life and Works
12.3 *Emma*: Summary
12.4 *Emma*: Themes
12.5 *Emma*: Characters
12.6 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
12.7 Summary
12.8 Key Words
12.9 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
12.10 Further Readings

12.0 INTRODUCTION

Emma written by Jane Austen was first published in 1815. The novel was a slight departure from the earlier novels written by Jane Austen due to the fact that the heroine, Emma like that of the previous novels does not exhibit any romantic inclination. It is only towards the end of the novel does Emma realize her love interest in Mr Knightley. The novel largely deals with the theme of love and matrimony and simultaneously delineates various characters of the novel.

12.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- List the significant works of Jane Austen
- Discuss the main characters of the novel *Emma*
- Summarize the novel *Emma*

12.2 JANE AUSTEN: LIFE AND WORKS

Jane Austen was the greatest of all novelists of manners who raised the genre of novel to a new level of art. She produced some of the greatest novels in history with her quietly penetrating vision of man, her ironic awareness of the claims of

personal morality and those of social and economic propriety, her polished and controlled wit and her steady moral assessment of the nature of human relationships.

Since her childhood, she was encouraged to write and pen down her ideas. Her life in the midst of the English country provided her with the opportunity to learn about the world of social pretentions and ambition, of dance balls and visits and speculations about marriage.

Jane Austen was born on 16 December 1775 at the church house in Hampshire. She was the seventh child of George Austen and Cassandra. She was educated mainly at home. She was extremely close to her elder sister, Cassandra. She read extensively using her father's library and got material from there in order to write short satirical sketches when she was a child. She had begun writing at an early age though only for her family circle. She found the raw materials for her novels in her daily routine, visits, shopping, sewing, gossip and other trivial matters. The world, which her books present to us, is essentially the eighteenth century world in its habits, tastes and appearances.

Sometime around Jane's pre-adolescence phase, she and Cassandra were sent to boarding school so that they could gain more concrete and formal knowledge. Unfortunately, both Jane and Cassandra fell victim to typhus, and it seemed impossible for Jane to recuperate back at that time. Post recovery, the sisters spent some more time attending school, but their education was unexpectedly terminated as the family underwent severe financial crisis. Due to this, the sisters returned home and resided with their family.

She did not gain her due as a writer during her own time. But Austen's tongue-in-cheek take on the amorous lives of the landed gentry found its due popularity only after 1869. Her stature as a writer of substance evolved more prominently in the twentieth century. Her popular novels like *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Emma, Persuasion, Northanger Abbey* and *Mansfield Park* hold great significance as they are literary classics, bringing about a seamless blending of romance and realism of the Victorian Age. The leading characters of her novels were women of fine upbringing and contemporary views. Since her novels did not conform to the Victorian and Romantic expectations that strong emotions need to be authenticated by a superfluous display of colour and sound in the writings, nineteenth century audiences and critics usually preferred the works of George Eliot, Thomas Hardy and Charles Dickens. Although her novels were re-published in England in the 1830s and remained continual sellers, they were not able to gain the privilege of becoming bestsellers.

Jane Austen was forever attracted towards stories. Her fascination for them initiated her to write in notebooks in the early stages of her writing career. During the 1790s, when Jane was in her adolescence, she composed her novel *Love and Friendship*. It was a collection of a parody of amorous letters which were written with the intention to sketch the genre of romantic fiction. This work set the tone for

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her later writing. It clearly displayed Jane Austen's dislike for an excessive romantic attitude or sensibility. The year after completion of *Love and Friendship,* Jane wrote *The History of England*. It was another parody which ridiculed the historical writing. This thirty-four page work also contained illustrations sketched by her sister Cassandra. These notebooks of Jane Austen, containing her short compositions, poems, novels and dramas are collectively called Jane's *Juvenilia*.

Jane's youth was spent trying to help maintain her family. She also played the piano and like a good Christian, was a regular at Church. She socialized with the people in her neighbourhood as well. She was an accomplished dancer and regularly read aloud to her family during the evening hours. In the meantime, she kept honing her writing skills and developing her distinctive style. In her youth, she wrote *Lady Susan*, a more accomplished work than her previous attempts. This was also an epistolary story which dealt with the life of a woman who knew how to manipulate situations to suit her purposes by using her charm, intelligence and sexuality. She also started composing *Elinor and Marianne*, another epistolary effort, which was later published as one of her famous masterpieces, *Sense and Sensibility*.

Jane Austen's first three novels fetched her both commercial as well as critical success, which she was able to experience in her lifetime. But it was only after her demise that her brother revealed to the world that his sister was an author of high repute and immense talent by publishing her later works.

Jane Austen is definitely one of the most popular authors of our times, her novels genuinely liked and widely read by all. She has been a darling of both critics and readers alike.

Jane Austen did for the English novel precisely what the Lake poets did for English poetry. One of the ways in which Jane Austen is different from other eighteenth century novelists is that she does not share their standard picaresque form and comic epic in prose. On the contrary, she isolated herself from the elements of mock-heroic and picaresque, which were the hallmarks of the eighteenth century novel. The primacy of emotion, preference for the marriage of love, urges for adventure, attraction for the uncommon, and above all, the superiority of sensibility in the novels of Jane Austen are definitely romantic traits. All of Austen's major novels are dominated by the female protagonists and are primarily concerned with the twin themes of love and marriage.

Jane Austen stays on the middle ground between the extremes of sense and sensibility, which constitutes one of the shades on the spectrum of Romanticism. Her concern with the inner life of her characters rather than their external interests is what stands out conspicuously in her novels. Beneath the outward pursuit of marriage, security and status, the driving force in her female protagonists is always the inner, human urge for a delicate life of sense and emotion as well as peace and harmony.

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In the year 2002, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) conducted a poll where she was honoured with the seventieth position on a list of '100 most famous Britons of all time'. Scholars of the 1920s have contributed immensely towards 'rediscovering' Austen as a great literary figure and reestablishing her popularity. The fans of Jane Austen prefer to call themselves 'The Janeites'. The widespread popularity of her writing in the modern period is established from the fact that her work has been adapted into films and TV programmes. In the year 2007, author David Lassman submitted various manuscripts of Jane Austen with very few modifications under a disguised name to some publishing houses. He was shocked to discover that all the manuscripts were rejected. He wrote this experience in one of his articles called 'Rejecting Jane'. This article was a tribute to the author who was an unbeatable champion of wit and humour.

In July 1809, the women of the Austen house moved back to Hampshire countryside when their brother Edward offered them a permanent home at his Chawton Estate. The place provided a perfect setting for Jane Austen to write. She stayed in this house for seven and a half years and these years turned out to be a phase of intense literary activity for her. Between 1811 and 1813, she revised *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* and published them. *Mansfield Park* was published in 1814 and *Emma* in 1816 and she completed *Persuasion* (which was published together with *Northanger Abbey* in 1818, the year after her death). All her novels were said to be written 'By a Lady'. She died on 18 July 1817 when she was 41 years old. She is buried in Winchester Cathedral.

Let us list out some of the popular novels by Jane Austen:

- Sense and Sensibility – Published in 1811, it was Austen's first published novel. The novel is about Eleanor and Marianne, two daughters of Mr Dashwood, who encounter the sense and sensibility of life and love through the course of the novel.
- Pride and Prejudice (1813) – The novel was first published in 1813. The story follows the protagonist Elizabeth Bennet as she deals with issues of etiquettes and marriage in the society of nineteenth century England.
- Mansfield Park (1814) – Mansfield Park was written when Austen was at Chawton Cottage.
- Northanger Abbey (1818, posthumous) – At first, the novel was called Susan. It was written in 1798–99. Austen revised it in 1803 and sold it to a London bookseller for £10. The publisher decided not to publish the novel. In 1817, the bookseller sold it back to Henry Austen, Jane Austen's brother for £10 not knowing the popularity of the author at that time. The novel was further revised and was published in 1818.
- Persuasion (1818, posthumous) – *Persuasion* is another novel by Jane Austen that was published after her death.

Short fiction written by Jane Austen

- *Lady Susan* (1794, 1805)

Unfinished fiction written by Jane Austen

- *The Watsons* (1804)
- *Sanditon* (1817)

Other works by Jane Austen

- *Sir Charles Grandison* (adapted play) (1793, 1800)
- *Plan of a Novel* (1815)
- *Poems* (1796–1817)
- *Prayers* (1796–1817)
- *Letters* (1796–1817)

Juvenilia — Volume the First (1787–1793)

- *Frederic & Elfrida*
- *Jack & Alice*
- *Edgar & Emma*
- *Henry and Eliza*
- *The Adventures of Mr. Harley*
- *Sir William Mountague*
- *Memoirs of Mr. Clifford*
- *The Beautifull Cassandra*
- *Amelia Webster*
- *The Visit*
- *The Mystery*
- *The Three Sisters*
- *A beautiful description*
- *The generous Curate*
- *Ode to Pity*

Juvenilia — Volume the Second (1787–1793)

- *Love and Friendship*
- *Lesley Castle*
- *The History of England*
- *A Collection of Letters*

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- *The Female Philosopher*
- *The First Act of a Comedy*
- *A Letter from a Young Lady*
- *A Tour through Wales*
- *A Tale*

Juvenilia — Volume the Third (1787–1793)

- *Evelyn*
- *Catharine, or the Bower*

Check Your Progress

1. When and where was Jane Austen born?
2. Name the popular novels written by Jane Austen.

12.3 *EMMA*: SUMMARY

The twenty year old protagonist Emma is a resident of the village of Highbury. Although she is convinced that she herself will never marry, she imagines herself to be naturally endowed with the ability to conjure love matches. She is thrilled with the successful matchmaking between her governess and Mr Weston, a widower.

Emma takes up the responsibility to find a suitable match for Harriet Smith. The parentage of Harriet is not known. However, Emma believes that Harriet deserves to be a gentleman's wife and asks her friend to consider Mr Elton for marriage, who is the village vicar. Harriet is inclined towards Robert Martin, a well-to-do farmer, but Emma convinces Harriet to reject his marriage proposal. Due to continuous encouragement by Emma, Harriet starts to develop feelings for Mr Elton. The situation becomes ironical when Emma fails to realize that Elton is inclined towards her and not Harriet. Emma feels shocked when she realizes that she is losing touch with the reality of life due to her obsession with matchmaking.

Mr Knightley, Emma's brother-in-law and her good friend, critically observes Emma's matchmaking efforts. He considers Mr Martin as a worthy match for Harriet. Mr Knightley and Emma quarrel with each other over the latter's meddling role in Harriet's matchmaking. Mr Knightley proves to be a wise person in this quarrel.

During a conversation with Elton, Emma's implication that Harriet is his equal offends him and he leaves for the town of Bath and immediately marries a girl there. Emma tries to comfort her friend. Emma then speculates about Mr Weston's son, Frank Churchill, who is expected to visit Highbury. Frank is raised by his aunt and uncle in London and they have taken him as their heir as well. He

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has not visited his father for a long time. Mr Knightley is suspicious towards Frank and the incident of Frank's rushing back to London just to have his haircut makes him more suspicious towards him. On the other hand, Emma finds Frank charming and feels that he is inclined towards her. She decides to discourage these charms but ends up flirting with the young man. Emma meets Jane Fairfax, another visitor to Highbury. Jane is beautiful but Emma does not like her. Mr Knightley defends Jane saying that she deserves empathy because she does not have an independent fortune and might have to leave home to work as a governess. According to Mrs Weston, Mr Knightley's defence is due to his romantic feelings towards Jane but Emma opposes this opinion. Everyone feels that Frank and Emma are inclined towards each other but Emma dismisses Frank as a prospective match for her and sees him as a suitor for Harriet.

At a village ball, Knightley offers to dance with Harriet because she was humiliated by Mr Elton and his new wife. This kindheartedness of Knightley helps him earn Emma's approval. The next day, Frank saves Harriet from Gypsy beggars. When Harriet shares with Emma that she is in love with a man who is above her social class, Emma thinks that she is talking about Frank. Knightley suspects that Frank and Jane are inclined towards each other and he tries to warn Emma. Emma feels amused by Knightley's implication and laughs at him. She again flirts with Frank and insults Jane's aunt, Miss Bates, who is a kindhearted spinster. Knightley reprimands Emma for this action.

Everyone comes to know that Frank has lost his aunt. This event paves the path for the unfolding of the secret that Frank and Jane have been secretly engaged and he flirted with Emma in order to conceal his engagement with Jane. With his uncle's approval, Frank later marries Jane.

Emma feels worried about Harriet but comes to know that Harriet is in love with Knightley, not Frank. Harriet believes that Knightley also loves her. Emma feels sad with this revelation and her sadness on this revelation makes her realize that she is in love with Knightley. After this, Emma expects that Knightley would tell her that he loves Harriet but to her joy, Knightley declares his love for Emma. Robert Martin proposes to Harriet and she accepts his offer. The novel ends with the marriage of Emma and Mr Knightley and that of Harriet and Mr Martin.

Check Your Progress

3. Who is a worthy match for Harriet as per Mr Knightley?
4. Why does Mr Knightley offer to dance with Harriet at a village ball?

12.4 *EMMA:* THEMES

Emma is the story of a girl who is clever as well as rich. She genuinely desires to change the lives of her social inferiors as well as her equals. Her overconfidence

and her desire to change people's lives make her go through some shocks, which later help her achieve a higher degree of self-knowledge. This self-realization helps her find her true love, Mr Knightley, who is the brother of her elder sister's husband.

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Her self-deception and haughtiness sometimes turns her into a comic figure. It is through her that the theme of self-deception is presented in the novel. In spite of this, she does not lose the sympathy of her readers. In the opening line, Austen explains: 'Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her.'

There are a number of traps for Emma's vanity and self-importance throughout the novel and she falls into each one of them. She decides to protect Harriet Smith, 'the natural daughter of somebody', and decides to find a suitable match for her. In this attempt, she goes to the extent of breaking off Harriet's incipient love affair with Mr Martin, a worthy and suitable match for her. Emma feels that Mr Elton is a more suitable match for Harriet but Mr Elton, a foolish young man, misunderstands Emma's behaviour and proposes to her.

In her second attempt to marry off Harriet, Emma gets involved in serious trouble. She tries to get Harriet interested in Frank Churchill. Harriet, misunderstanding Emma's elegant hints, thinks she is referring to Mr Knightley and falls in love with him. It is a shock for Emma when Harriet makes clear that she would not allow anyone to marry Mr Knightley but herself. The moral pattern is carefully woven and Emma's attempt to play God involves her in a variety of situations, which contribute to her self-knowledge in the end. Emma wants Frank Churchill to marry Harriet but she is also attracted to him. There is an interesting tension between her admiration for his vitality and wit and her half-realized love for Mr Knightley 'one of the few people who could see faults in Emma Woodhouse'. Mr Knightley is a wealthy landowner, around seventeen years older than Emma. He is generous, kind to his tenants, intolerant towards deceit and cruelty and does not have superficial gaiety like Frank Churchill.

While Emma is scheming for Frank and Harriet's match, Mr Knightley feels that she herself is falling in love with Frank. The situation is enriched with ironies with the introduction of Jane Fairfax. Jane is a foil for Emma; she has no fortune but is equally talented and at music, even more talented than Emma. This fact perhaps raises an unconscious jealousy in Emma. Emma amuses herself by hinting and speculating about Jane's relationship with Mr Dixon and joking about it with Frank. It appears that Frank and Emma make fun of Jane. The fun is not wholly innocent on Emma's part; there is an element of jealousy in it if not spite. Further, Jane's lack of fortune means that if she does not marry soon she will have to take up a position as a governess and the horrors and humiliation of that kind of work are made abundantly evident through Mrs Elton's insufferably patronizing offers to help her in getting a job. Emma therefore has no moral right to laugh either at Jane or at her garrulous aunt, a character on whom Emma vents a momentary irritation

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and Mr Knightley castigates Emma for this. It emerges at last that the relationship between Jane and Mr Dixon, which Emma has conjured up and about which she has joked so often with Frank, has no basis and Jane and Frank are secretly engaged. Emma suddenly realizes that she is and has been a dupe. At every point, Emma's wit and knowingness leads to her humiliation but Mr Knightley stands by her. The exploration of different kinds of selfishness as well as the sharply ironic character sketches of characters like the Eltons and Miss Bates gives the novel real depth underneath the surface brilliance.

The character of Emma's father, whose concern for other people is a way of implementing a profound selfishness, opens and closes the book. The novel symbolizes the ambiguities of selfishness, which is one of the themes of this novel. The moral pattern is spelled out more clearly in *Emma* than in *Pride and Prejudice*, but in other respects, it is a less sharply drawn novel, standing midway with respect to subtlety and complexity between *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park*.

In the early nineteenth century, the status of women was defined in terms of their accomplishments that would make them a suitable 'property' to get married and acceptance of marriage proposal by a person of high social status. Every mother desired to marry off their daughters in wealthy families because they saw this as the shortest and surest way to climb the social ladder. The bride's family would choose a suitable match for her on the basis of the family's reputation and their inheritance. It was the only area laid open by society for women to exercise their choice and freedom and feel the sense of empowerment on getting the right groom. The entire structure of the novel *Emma* is based on the theme of marriage.

There is a significant point raised in the novel. The ritual of marriage should be consummated between families of equal social status only then would they be successful otherwise they become void. Mr Weston's marriage to Miss Churchill was not successful and suffered many hardships. On the other hand, his marriage to Mrs Weston, shown in the beginning of the novel, is quite successful as both the families stand on equal footing. Mrs Weston was a governess before marriage and was more than happy to be rescued from it. Emma's fruitless attempts to consummate the marriage of the otherwise incompatible Harriet and Mr Elton form another point. She compels Harriet to reject her feelings for Robert Martin who would have proved a suitable match for Harriet. Martin hails from the family of tradesmen so he would have been a suitable match for Harriet. Frank Churchill's engagement to Jane Fairfax is a relationship in question. The marriage of Emma with Mr Knightly is successful because they have a similar social status, compatibility and temperament.

During this period, the privileges given to women were shockingly limited. If she had the freedom to go out, it was not for work but for social visits, charity visits or music and art. The limitation of social space for women hampered their development of personality. There was little room to display their intellectual abilities. Their entire energies and capabilities were directed towards fulfillment of marital

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aims. The only active work they could do was getting the right kind of marriage proposal, preparing for the marriage and working towards successful consummation of it. Quiet shockingly, there were characters like Jane Fairfax, who saw marriage as a route to be a woman of fortune without undergoing the drudgery of working for it. For example, Jane compared the work of governess to slave trade.

Another significant feature of the novel is the way in which it brings forth the idiosyncrasies of personal prejudices of the characters. Thus, the novel also deals with the theme of prejudices of people. Emma guides Mr Elton in pursuing his love because she thinks that he is in love with Harriet. Meanwhile, Mr Elton misunderstands her concern and proposes to her. Emma and Mr Elton's personal prejudices blind them to the real situation. Both are oblivious to each other's feelings and desires. Emma tries to build a relationship between Harriet and Frank but it takes a turn when Harriet develops desires for Mr Knightley. Frank's desire to use Emma as a screen for his real preference makes him believe that Emma is aware of the relationship between him and Jane. A detached narrator can see that the personal prejudices of characters create a lot of misunderstandings. It creates a lot of humour and a dramatic space for the interplay of irony.

Does that mean that interactions among the characters on various platforms of social propriety like the dance balls; music and art circles should be minimized or eliminated as they give rise to a lot of misunderstanding and confusion? According to Austen, elimination is not the answer but restraint should be practiced. She says that the emphasis should be on clear communication and open expression among the interacting partners. Austen says that there should be certain codes of communication and verbal decency. The bantering of Emma is misleading because it is full of gregariousness and vanity. She hurts Miss Bates and hates Jane in an indiscreet fashion. Mr Elton has a flimsy, ostentatious and insincere style of praising people. Frank also tells people what they want to hear. Mr Knightley proves right in being suspicious of Frank's integrity.

Check Your Progress

5. State two significant traits of Emma's character.
6. Who is a foil to Emma's character in the novel?

12.5 *EMMA*: CHARACTERS

Let us study the major characters of the novel, *Emma*.

Emma

In the opening lines, she is described as 'handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition,' Emma 'had lived nearly twenty-one

years in the world with very little to distress or vex her.' However, the narrator also tells us that Emma possesses 'the power of having rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself.'

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Emma's obstinacy produces many conflicts in the novel. In the novel, Emma makes three major mistakes. First, she tries to help Harriet marry a gentleman when Harriet's social position commands that the farmer, who loves her, is best suited to her. Second, she flirts with Frank Churchill even though she does not have any intention to marry him and makes unfair comments about Jane Fairfax. Third, she claims that she is committed to staying single and does not realize her own feelings that she is in love with Mr Knightley and wants to marry him. These mistakes threaten Harriet's happiness, make Emma embarrassed and create problems in Emma's path to find her true love.

Although the omniscient narrator speaks in the third person yet many events are observed through Emma's point of view. This narrative strategy forces the readers to sympathize with Emma and make ironic judgment on her behaviour. It also makes Emma a multidimensional character.

Emma is compared implicitly with other women in the novel. This allows the readers to assess her character. There are a lot of similarities between Jane and Emma but the fact that Jane is not financially independent highlights Emma's privileged nature. Mrs Elton is independent like Emma but the former's crude behaviour and pride forces the readers to observe Emma's refined nature. Emma's sister, Isabella, is described as a stereotypical traditional woman who is tender and entirely devoted and dependent on her family. The narrator seems to prefer Emma's independence to her sister's traditional outlook.

Mr Knightley

In the novel, Mr Knightley is a model of good sense. Right from the beginning of the novel, we find him correcting the excesses and mistakes of people around him. He is honest but knows where to temper his honesty with diplomacy and compassion. Readers find him a trustworthy person who can provide them the accurate assessment of the other characters' behaviour. He is compassionate and protective towards women. He is considerate towards Jane, Harriet and Miss Bates and helps them as well.

Knightley's love for Emma is the only emotion, which he is not able to handle properly. He decides that Frank is not a good person even before meeting him. Gradually, the unfolding of the events reveals that he is jealous of his 'rival'. When Knightley notices that Emma is a bit inclined towards Frank, he acts impulsively and leaves for London. When he comes back, he declares his love for Emma in an uncontrollable manner. However, this fact does not make him a failure but humanizes his character.

Knightley is also compared implicitly with various male members of his community. His brother, Mr. John Knightley is clear-sightedness but not kindhearted and tactful like him. Both Frank and Knightley are intelligent, observant, affectionate and vibrant; but Frank uses his intelligence to conceal his true emotions and please others, whereas Knightley uses his intelligence to correct the excesses and mistakes of people around him.

Frank Churchill

Frank Churchill is known for his attractive personality. He uses Emma as a screen to hide his secret engagement with Jane. He flirts with Emma even though he does not love her. He says what people want to hear in order to please them.

Jane Fairfax

Jane is a foil for Emma. The fact that she is not financially independent highlights Emma's privileged nature. She has no fortune but is equally talented and at music more talented than Emma. She sees marriage as a route to be a woman of fortune without undergoing the drudgery of a working woman. Her lack of fortune means that if she does not marry soon she will have to take up a position as a governess. She compares the work of governess to slave trade.

Harriet Smith

She is Emma's friend in the novel. Emma takes the responsibility to find a match for her. In the beginning of the novel, Harriet is believed to an illegitimate child though her parentage is not known. It is only at the end of the novel that we come to know that she is a daughter of a well-to-do tradesman. Harriet is easily led by others; for instance, she refuses to marry Robert Martin just because Emma feels that he is not a 'gentleman' and is beneath her in social status. She is a catalyst through which Emma's misguided matchmaking attempts are depicted in the novel. It is because of her attraction towards Mr Knightley that makes Emma realize that she loves Mr Knightley. At the end of the novel, Emma supports Harriet's desire to marry Mr Martin.

Philip Elton

He is a good-looking young vicar. Emma feels that he is a suitable match for Harriet. However, the situation becomes ironical when Emma comes to know that he is inclined towards her and not Harriet. Emma's implied remark that Harriet is his equal offends him and he quickly rushes to Bath and marries another girl there.

Augusta Elton

She is Philip Elton's wife. She is wealthy but a dominant and ostentatious woman who always tries to seek people's attention. Emma does not approve of her behaviour and dislikes her. She patronizes Jane Fairfax in the novel.

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Mrs Anne Weston

Formerly known as Miss Taylor, she was Emma's governess for 16 years before she marries Mr Weston due to Emma's matchmaking attempts. She admires and adores Emma and remains her confidante throughout the novel. She also acts as her surrogate mother.

Mr. Weston

He marries Miss Taylor who was Emma's governess. He is Frank Churchill's father by his first marriage. In the novel, he is shown as a cheerful man who loves socializing.

Isabella

She is Emma's elder sister and John Knightley's wife. In the novel, she is shown as a traditional girl who spends most of the time in taking care of her house and her children.

John Knightley

He is George Knightley's younger brother and Isabella's husband. He indulges in visits and vacations as per his family's wishes. However, he personally prefers to stay at home.

Check Your Progress

7. How has Isabella been contrasted with Emma in the novel?
8. How is Emma used as a façade by Frank Churchill?

12.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Jane Austen was born on 16 December 1775 at the church house in Hampshire.
2. The popular novels written by Jane Austen are *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Emma, Persuasion, Northanger Abbey* and *Mansfield Park*.
3. Mr Knightley considers Mr Martin as a worthy match for Harriet.
4. At a village ball, Knightley offers to dance with Harriet because she was humiliated by Mr Elton and his new wife. This kindheartedness of Knightley helps him earn Emma's approval.

5. Two significant traits of Emma's character are that she is overconfident and extremely haughty.
6. Jane is a foil for Emma in the novel. She has no fortune but is equally talented and at music, even more talented than Emma. This fact perhaps raises an unconscious jealousy in Emma.
7. Emma's sister, Isabella, has been presented as a stereotypical traditional woman who is tender and entirely devoted and dependent on her family. On the other hand, Emma is an independent thinking lady with a positive outlook in life.
8. Frank Churchill uses Emma as a facade to hide his secret engagement with Jane. He flirts with Emma even though he does not love her.

12.7 SUMMARY

- Jane Austen was the greatest of all novelists of manners who raised the genre of novel to a new level of art.
- Jane Austen was born on 16 December 1775 at the church house in Hampshire. She was the seventh child of George Austen and Cassandra.
- Austin did not gain her due as a writer during her own time. But Austen's tongue-in-cheek take on the amorous lives of the landed gentry found its due popularity only after 1869.
- Austen's popular novels like *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Emma, Persuasion, Northanger Abbey* and *Mansfield Park* hold great significance as they are literary classics, bringing about a seamless blending of romance and realism of the Victorian Age.
- Jane Austen's first three novels fetched her both commercial as well as critical success, which she was able to experience in her lifetime. But it was only after her demise that her brother revealed to the world that his sister was an author of high repute and immense talent by publishing her later works.
- The twenty year old protagonist Emma is a resident of the village of Highbury. Although she is convinced that she herself will never marry, she imagines herself to be naturally endowed with the ability to conjure love matches.
- Mr Knightley, Emma's brother-in-law and her good friend, critically observes Emma's matchmaking efforts. He considers Mr Martin as a worthy match for Harriet.
- Emma feels worried about Harriet but comes to know that Harriet is in love with Knightley, not Frank. Harriet believes that Knightley also loves her. Emma feels sad with this revelation and her sadness on this revelation makes her realize that she is in love with Knightley.

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- *Emma* is the story of a girl who is clever as well as rich. She genuinely desires to change the lives of her social inferiors as well as her equals. Her overconfidence and her desire to change people's lives make her go through some shocks, which later help her achieve a higher degree of self-knowledge.
- The character of Emma's father, whose concern for other people is a way of implementing a profound selfishness, opens and closes the book.
- In the early nineteenth century, the status of women was defined in terms of their accomplishments that would make them a suitable 'property' to get married and acceptance of marriage proposal by a person of high social status.
- Another significant feature of the novel is the way in which it brings forth the idiosyncrasies of personal prejudices of the characters.
- In the novel, Mr Knightley is a model of good sense. Right from the beginning of the novel, we find him correcting the excesses and mistakes of people around him.
- Jane is a foil for Emma. The fact that she is not financially independent highlights Emma's privileged nature.
- John Knightley is George Knightley's younger brother and Isabella's husband. He indulges in visits and vacations as per his family's wishes. However, he personally prefers to stay at home.

12.8 KEY WORDS

- **Romanticism:** It is a movement in the arts and literature that originated in the late eighteenth century, emphasizing inspiration, subjectivity, and the primacy of the individual.
- **Epistolary:** An epistolary novel or story is one that is written as a series of letters.
- **Lake poets:** This term refers to the English poets William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Robert Southey, who lived in the English Lake District of Cumberland and Westmorland at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

12.9 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Briefly mention the life of Jane Austen.
2. Write short notes on the following characters of the novel:

   (a) Mr Knightley (b) Jane Fairfax

3. What was the position and status of women in society as depicted in Austen's novel, *Emma*?

Long-Answer Questions

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1. **'**Jane Austen did for the English novel precisely what the Lake poets did for English poetry.' Explain the statement.
2. Summarize the novel Emma in your own words.
3. Critically analyse the significant themes of the novel, *Emma*.

12.10 FURTHER READINGS

Farner,Geir 2014. *Literary Fiction: The Ways We Read Narrative Literature.* USA: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Milhorn, H. Thomas. 2006. *Writing Genre Fiction: A Guide to the Craft.* Boca Raton, USA: Universal Publishers.

Bloom, Harold. 1986. *Jane Austen.* New York: Chelsea House.

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UNIT 13 WALTER SCOTT

NOTES

Structure

13.0 Introduction
13.1 Objectives
13.2 Walter Scott's *Kenilworth*
13.3 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
13.4 Summary
13.5 Key Words
13.6 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
13.7 Further Readings

13.0 INTRODUCTION

Walter Scott's novel *Kenilworth* is seemingly set in 1575 England. It is a historical novel in the sense that it deals with the historical characters and events, but one needs to remember that it should not be taken as a history, but a literary narrative where history is being used for the purpose of bringing out the complexities of the age. Walter Scott is known for his historical novels and is a great practitioner of the genre.

The novel *Kenilworth* centers on the secret marriage of Robert Dudley, the first Earl of Leicester, and Amy Robsart, daughter of Sir Hugh Robsart. It was a novel dealing with passion and ambition and thus makes for a good reading. In the course of the novel, Amy Robsart flees from her father and her betrothed, Tressilian, to marry the Earl. Whereas. Robert Dudley is courting the favour of Queen Elizabeth I, the then Queen of England, and therefore he keeps his marriage a secret so that he can rise to the heights of power. He is caught between his desire for power in the political order and his passion for Amy. It is a novel which brings to fore the sensibilities of the time – passion, desire, ambition and treachery which are part of the higher echelons of the society. In this context, it is to be remembered that the title of the novel *Kenilworth* refers to Robert Dudley's caste in Kenilworth, Warwickshire, though the novel opens at Cumnor Place, near Abingdon in Berkshire (now Oxfordshire).

13.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss Walter Scott as a novelist
- Analyze Scott's poem *Kenilworth*
- Describe the genre of historical novel
- Understand the critical appreciation of the novel *Kenilworth*

13.2 WALTER SCOTT'S KENILWORTH

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A Scottish author and poet, Walter Scott was born in 1771 in Edinburgh. He is known for his historical novel. He attended Edinburgh High School and studied arts and law at Edinburgh University. Scott was apprenticed to his father in 1786 and in 1792, he was called to the bar. In 1802-03, Scott's first major work, *'Ministerly of the Scottish Border'* which was a collection of ballads appeared. This was followed by the 12 years' series of metrical romances.

Scott's first novel was a historical novel named *Waverley*. It was set in the period of the Jacobite uprising of 1745, which sought to restore the Stuart dynasty. This was followed by a series of novels of the Jacobite (Stuart) rebellions of the 18^{th} century *Rob Roy* (1817), *Waverley and Redgauntlet* (1824). Other Scottish novels indirectly related to historical themes were *The Black Dwarf* (1816), *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818), *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819) and *The Pirate* (1822). Scott also wrote a group of novels set in his own times: *Guy Mannering* (1815), *The Antiquary* (1816) and *St Ronan's Well* (1824). Walter Scott died in 1832.

A Note on Historical Novel

Some realistic novels make use of events and personages from the historical past to add interest and picturesqueness to the narrative. What we usually specify as the **historical novel,** however, began in the nineteenth century with Sir Walter Scott. The historical novel not only takes its setting and some characters and events from history but makes the historical events and issues crucial for the central characters and the narrative. Some of the greatest historical novels also use the protagonists and actions to reveal what the author regards as the deep forces that impel the historical process. Examples of historical novels are Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1819), set in the period of Norman domination of the Saxons at the time of Richard I; Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), in Paris and London during the French Revolution; George Eliot's *Romola* (1863), in Florence during the Renaissance; Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1869), during Napoleon's invasion of Russia; and Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (1936), in Georgia during the Civil War and Reconstruction. An influential treatment of the form was by the Marxist scholar and critic Georg Lukács, *The Historical Novel* (1937; trans. 1962); a comprehensive later commentary is Harry E. Shaw, *The Forms of Historical Fiction: Sir Walter Scott and His Successors* (1983).

Sir Walter Scott, 'the prophesier of things past,' brought to the contemporary age interest in the past and with his own splendid gift of imagination; he developed an almost new genre, the historical novel. 'To the historical novel,' writes Edward

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Albert, 'he brought a knowledge that was not pedantically exact, but manageable, wide and bountiful. To the sum of this knowledge, he added a life-giving force, a vitalizing energy, an insight, and a genial dexterity that made the historical novel an entirely new species. He noted that he did much to develop the domestic novel, which had several representatives in the Waverley series, such as *Guy Mannering* and *The Antiquary*.'

Few novelists before Scott had attempted to write historical fiction, Horace, Walpole, Clara Reeve and Mrs. Radcliffe were concerned in their historical romances with periods sufficiently remote to be invested with romantic charm and to offer scope for the imaginative treatment of history. None of these writers possessed any feeling for historical realism and they made no attempt to induce in the reader 'a willing suspension of disbelief'. Scott defined the novel as a fictitious narrative in prose or verse because the events are accommodated to the ordinary train of human events, and the modern state of society. Scott combined the elements of real life with elements of wonder from old romance and created a new synthesis of historical prose romance.

His very first novel *Waverley* is 'a slight attempt at a sketch of ancient Scottish Inaner.' Scott had a comprehensive knowledge of the Scottish past. *Guy Mannering* and *The Antiquary* truthfully picture the manners and a state of society that could breed such characters as *Meg Merrilies*, *Dandie Dinmont*, and *Counsellor Pleydelle. The Antiquary* is also important for its peasant humours, which makes it a true picture of the manners of Scotland. *Old Mortality* takes us to the troubled times of Charles II and the rising of Covenanters in 1685, It is a historical monument of the finest pictures of the past, its men, its ideas and manners. In *Ivanhoe* Scott took up England as his scene, and reconstructed not the eighteenth century he knew, but the Middle Ages.

In order to create historical realism, Scott employed a language approximating to common speech but heightened with poetry and with just enough of archaisms to create an illusion of the past. In his use of the Scottish vernacular, Scott is exceedingly natural and vivacious. His characters who employ Scottish dialect owe much of their freshness and attraction to his happy use of their native tongue.

Summary and Critical Appreciation of the Novel – *Kenilworth*

The innkeeper, Giles Gosling, welcomes his nephew, Michael Lambourne as he returns from Flanders. He invites the Cornishman, Tressilian and other guests to drink. Lambourne makes a wager that he will obtain an introduction to a certain young lady under the steward Foster's charge at Cumnor Place, seat of the Earl of Leicester, and the Cornish stranger begs permission to accompany him. On arriving there, Tressilian finds that this lady is his former beloved, Amy Robsart, daughter of Sir Hugh Robsart. He wants to carry her back to her home, but she refuses; Next, Amy is sent costly gifts from the Earl, and in his next visit, she pleads that she might inform her father of their marriage, but he says that he is afraid of Elizabeth's resentment.

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Tressilian comes to know how Amy is being entrapped in the castle, he reaches the residence of Sir Hugh Robsart, Amy's father, to help him in laying his daughter's case before the queen. Returning to London, Tressilian's servant, Wayland Smith, cures the Earl of Sussex of a dangerous illness. On hearing about this from Walter Raleigh, Elizabeth at once set out to visit Leicester's rival, and it is in this way that Tressilian's petition, on Amy's behalf, is handed to her. The Queen is agitated to learn of this secret marriage. Varney is summoned and he declares Amy to be his wife, and the earl is restored to the queen's favour.

Meanwhile, Leicester is preparing to entertain the Queen at Kenilworth, where she commands that Amy should be introduced to her. During the evening, she enquires for Varney's wife, and is told that she is too ill to be present. Nevertheless, the Earl was knighted by the Queen.

Next morning, Amy found her way to the gardens, where she was discovered by Elizabeth, and declares Varney not to be her husband, and added that the Earl of Leicester knows all. The Earl is instantly summoned, but Varney somehow convinces the queen that it is her madness which has made her say so and that she has acted in connivance with Tressilian, The next day the Earl and Tressilian are about to duel which is somehow stopped. Leicester now confesses that Amy is his wife. The following evening, Amy rushes from her room and as she does, she steps on the bridge, and falls to her death. Merrymaking at Kenilworth comes to and end: Leicester retires from Court, and Sir Hugh Robsart, who dies very soon after his daughter, settles his estate on Tressilian. Leicester presses for an impartial inquiry. Though the jury found that Amy's death was an accident, it was widely suspected that Leicester had arranged his wife's death to be able to marry the Queen.

Themes

As stated, *Kenilworth* is a novel dealing with multiple themes – it is a historical novel and therefore many events of history find expression in the novel which makes it an interesting read. The events in the novel sometimes are not presented in the same manner in which they happened as it is a fictional narrative and not a chronology that Scott is writing. The novel is written from the point of view of selfishness versus selflessness, ambition versus love and thus brings to the fore the human characteristics rather than a historical incident. History is just used in the context of the novel to talk about the said themes. These themes could have been explored otherwise, but when it is done through historical characters and events, it provides a different charm to the narrative which makes the novel worth reading.

In the novel, Amy and the Earl both struggle internally with selfishness and love, while Varney and Tressilian each typify the extremes of these two qualities. Ambition makes men blind as they think that everything is justified when one is reaching after his ambitious goal and thus often gets involved in deceits and crimes which mars their whole life. The Earl is shown to love Amy but at the same time, he has an ambition, for the fulfilment of which, he becomes deceitful and secretive

about his marriage to the Queen as he feels that it may mar his prospects. In the end, he realizes his folly and accepts his love for Amy but by then, it was too late.

Historical Inaccuracies

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As is the norm in historical fiction, the events, people, incidents and places present have very close resemblances with the historical reality and yet there are places where the novelist has to take poetic licenses with history so as to make his narrative authentic and provide a sense of pleasure to the readers in reading the novel. It is usually thought that Scott has depicted the Elizabethan Court with a greater sharpness and has been very successful in doing so. Yet some of the things in the novel are figments of Scott's imagination as has been pointed out by critics, such as –

- The circumstances of Amy Robsart's death from a fall are greatly altered,
- The novel is set in 1575, but facts show that Amy Robsart died on 8 September 1560.
- William Shakespeare was not even born until 1564 and cannot be in the court with Spenser
- Queen Elizabeth quotes from Troilus and Cressida, which was written around 1602.

In spite of these and other historical inaccuracies, it is to be rendered here that Scott made a fine narrative of ambition versus love to make it a pleasurable reading experience.

Check Your Progress

1. When did Scott's first major work appear?
2. Give three examples of historical novels.
3. Why did Scott define the novel as a fictitious narrative in prose or verse?
4. Why are events in *Kenilworth* not presented in a linear manner?

13.3 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. In 1802-03, Scott's first major work, 'Ministerly of the Scottish Border' a collection of ballads appeared.
2. Examples of historical novels are Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1819), set in the period of Norman domination of the Saxons at the time of Richard I; Dickens' *A*

Tale of Two Cities (1859), in Paris and London during the French Revolution; George Eliot's *Romola* (1863), in Florence during the Renaissance.

3. Scott defined the novel as a fictitious narrative in prose or verse because the events are accommodated to the ordinary train of human events, and the modern state of society.
4. The events in the novel sometimes are not presented in the same manner in which they happened as it is a fictional narrative and not a chronology that Scott is writing.

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13.4 SUMMARY

- A Scottish author and poet, Walter Scott was born in 1771 in Edinburgh. He is known for his historical novel.
- Scott's first novel was a historical novel named Waverley. It was set in the period of the Jacobite uprising of 1745, which sought to restore the Stuart dynasty. This was followed by a series of novels of the Jacobite (Stuart) rebellions of the 18th century *Rob Roy* (1817), *Waverley and Redgauntlet* (1824).
- The historical novel not only takes its setting and some characters and events from history but makes the historical events and issues crucial for the central characters and the narrative.
- Sir Walter Scott, 'the prophesier of things past,' brought to the contemporary age interest in the past and with his own splendid gift of imagination, he developed an almost new genre, the historical novel.
- Few novelists before Scott had attempted to write historical fiction, Horace, Walpole, Clara Reeve and Mrs. Radcliffe were concerned in their historical romances with periods sufficiently remote to be invested with romantic charm and to offer scope for the imaginative treatment of history.
- *Guy Mannering* and *The Antiquary* truthfully picture the manners and a state of society that could breed such characters as *Meg Merrilies*, *Dandie Dinmont*, and *Counsellor Pleydelle*.
- In his use of the Scottish vernacular, Scott is exceedingly natural and vivacious. His characters who employ Scottish dialect owe much of their freshness and attraction to his happy use of their native tongue.
- *Kenilworth* is a novel dealing with multiple themes – it is a historical novel and therefore many events of history find expression in the novel which makes it an interesting read.

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- In the novel, Amy and the Earl both struggle internally with selfishness and love, while Varney and Tressilian each typify the extremes of these two qualities.
- As is the norm in historical fiction, the events, people, incidents and places present have very close resemblances with the historical reality and yet there are places where the novelist has to take poetic licenses with history so as to make his narrative authentic.

13.5 KEY WORDS

- **Historical Novel:** It is a literary genre where the story takes place in the past. Historical novels capture the details of the time period as accurately as possible for authenticity, including social norms, manners, customs, and traditions.
- **Historical Realism:** It is a writing style or subgenre of realistic fiction centered on historical events and periods.

13.6 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Name some of Scott's novels related to historical themes.
2. What did Walter Scott add to the genre of the historical novel?
3. What did Scott employ in order to create historical realism?
4. From what point of view has the novel *Kenilworth* been written?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Discuss some of Walter Scott's novels and their themes.
2. Summarize the plot of the novel *Kenilworth.*
3. Elaborate upon the historical inaccuracies in *Kenilworth.*

13.7 FURTHER READINGS

Sutherland, John. 1995. *The Life of Sir Walter Scott: A Critical Biography.* Oxford: Blackwell

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UNIT 14 CHARLES DICKENS

NOTES

Structure

14.0 Introduction
14.1 Objectives
14.2 *A Tale of Two Cities*: Summary
14.3 Character Sketches and Themes
14.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
14.5 Summary
14.6 Key Words
14.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
14.8 Further Readings

14.0 INTRODUCTION

A Tale of Two Cities was published in Dickens' magazine *All The Year Round* in 1859. It is Dickens' second attempt at writing a historical fiction, the first one being *Barnaby Rudge* in 1841. Dickens performed in Wilkie Collin's play *The Frozen Deep* and liked its theme of redemption, love and violence and decided to provide a historical treatment to these issues. Thus, *A Tale of Two Cities* is not just concerned with the love triangle and the complex relationships, but true to its title, it describes the events in Paris and London before and during the French Revolution.

14.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss Charles Dickens as a novelist
- Examine the various characters of *A Tale of Two Cities*
- Describe the theme and setting of *A Tale of Two Cities*

14.2 *A TALE OF TWO CITIES:* SUMMARY

A Tale of Two Cities is set in the cities of Paris and London between 1775 and 1790. The French settings in the novel include the storming of Bastille by the peasants in Paris, the Defarge's wine shop, and the French chateau. The English settings include the London courtroom, the Tellson's bank and the Manette's house. Both France as well as England is weakened by the political and social unrest under the leadership of King Louis XVI of France and King George III of England.

Book the First: Recalled to Life

Chapters 1 to 4

In the year 1775, when France seems to be on the threshold of witnessing a revolution, indulged in extreme violence, England appears to be 'scarcely better'; as Dickens puts it, 'It was the best of times, it was the worst of times'. In the month of November, on a Friday night a mail coach is heading from London to Dover. Among the three passengers mounted in it, one is Jarvis Lorry, a clerk at Tellson's bank. The passengers hear a horse approaching and fear it to be a robber. However, a messenger appears from amongst the mist and asks for Jarvis Lorry. Recognizing the familiar sound of Jerry Cruncher, the messenger and runner at the Teller's bank, Mr Lorry receives a note from him. It reads, 'Wait at Dover for Mam's elle'. Lorry asks Jerry to return with the message- 'Recalled to Life'. Jerry is perplexed with the message, but he rides back to deliver it. The narrator ponders that 'every human creature is constituted to be that profound secret and mystery to every other.' Jarvis Lorry snoozes and dreams of repetitive conversations with a ghost who informs Lorry that his body has been buried for almost eighteen years. Lorry tells him that he has been 'recalled to life' and inquires whether he wants to live. He asks him in a mysterious manner if he should show 'her' to him. The ghost gives different reactions to him. He weeps and implores him to let him see her soon, and also says that he would die if he were to see her soon.

The coach arrives at Dover only with Jarvis Lorry as the other passengers have gotten down earlier. Lorry goes to the Royal George hotel and refreshes himself with some breakfast and a nap. He is expecting Lucie Mannette from London, who has been informed that some discovery has been made regarding the property of her dead father. Lorry informs her that the reason behind Tellson having called her to Paris is that her father whom she assumes to be dead, has been found alive. He further tells her that her father was once a doctor but now he has lost his memory and stays in the house of an old servant. He says that he must be secretly taken out of France and she can 'restore him to life, love, duty, rest, comfort.' Lucie is stunned by the information about her assumingly dead father and her servant Miss Pross enters to attend her.

Chapters 5 to 6

The scene shifts to Saint Antoine, a Paris suburb. The place appears to be cold and gloomy. A cask of red wine falls on the street and breaks. Everyone including the idlers and businessmen rush to it and drink the spilled wine. The women soak it up their handkerchiefs and drip it into the mouths of their babies. A man dips his finger into it and writes 'BLOOD' on a wall. Ernest Defarge, a 'bull- necked, martial looking man of thirty' is the owner of the wine shop. His wife Therese Defarge, apparently knitting inside the wine shop, keenly watches everything that takes place around her. As Monsieur Defarge enters the shop, she signals her

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husband of the arrival of a gentleman and a lady (Lorry and Lucie). Ignoring their presence, Defarge directs the three 'Jacques' (a secret name identifying them to be the revolutionaries) to a chamber. Mr Lorry has a word with him and then he leads them upstairs where the three men are standing. He says that he shows Doctor Manette to people occasionally and opens the door. The room is dark and Lucy clings to Lorry out of fear. They see a white - haired man stooped over a bench busy making shoes.

Dr Manette is a frail old man indifferent to the outside world. He reveals in his faint voice that he is making shoes of the latest fashion for a lady. He says his name is 'One Hundred and Five, North Tower'. As Lucie goes near him, he notices her golden hair and shows the similar strands of hair tied in a rag that he wears around his neck. He remembers having begged to be allowed to keep these golden strands of his wife upon his imprisonment. Lucie urges him to weep if he recalls his loved ones and assures him that his 'agony is over'. He is overcome by emotion on hearing his daughter's words and she hugs him. They decide to leave for England immediately. Defarge assists their departure and Lorry tells Dr Manette that he hopes that he cares to be recalled to life.

Book the Second: The Golden Thread

Chapters 1 to 5

The scene shifts to Tellson's bank in London in 1780. The old and reputed bank takes pride in its ugliness, darkness and smallness. The bank is located near the Temple Bar, a place where the criminals' executed heads were displayed till recent, since the death penalty was greatly used for even for the crimes like forgery and petty theft. Jerry Cruncher works as a messenger of the Tellson's bank. He lives in a small apartment and wakes up yelling at his wife who is praying. He complains that she is praying against him and flings a dirty boot at her. He takes his 12 years old son with him and leave for the Tellson's bank. Soon, Cruncher sets off for his job as a porter is called off by the inside messenger. His son wonders why his father's fingers are always rusty. As instructed, Cruncher goes to the Old Bailey court and waits for further instructions from Jarvis Lorry. In the court, Cruncher finds that Charles Darnay, a 'well- grown and well - looking' young man is on trial for treason. Cruncher gathers that the crowd in the courtroom desires to see Darnay publically executed as he has been charged with providing secret information to the French king Louis XVI. Dr Manette and his daughter Lucie are sitting in the court room as witnesses against Darnay, although Lucie is full of compassion for him.

The jury is informed by the Attorney General that Darnay has been passing English secrets to France for five years. John Barsad's testimony supports the Attorney General's case but cross examination reveals that Barsad has himself been in debtor's prison and involved in brawls over gambling. The defense attorney

Mr Stryver proves that the second witness Roger Cly is also untrustworthy. The similar questions are asked to Lorry and Lucie. While Lorry denies any familiarity with the accused, Lucie admits to have met Darnay on a ship going from France to England. Just as a witness insists that he can identify Darnay, Stryver draws the court's attention to his colleague Sidney Carton having striking resemblance with the accused. Darnay is acquitted by the court due to the uncanny resemblance leading to mistaken identity. Every one exits the court room and Darnay is congratulated by Dr. Manette, Lucie, Lorry and Stryver. Darnay kisses Lucie's hand and thanks Stryver. Stryver, Lucie and her father leave and a drunk Sidney Carter appears. Lorry chides him for not being serious with business. Carton joins Darnay to a tavern and they drink a toast to Lucie. Carton gets drunk and says to himself that he hates Darnay because he reminds him of what he has not achieved. The next morning, Carton meets Stryver in his apartment. They drink and discuss the court proceedings. Stryver-'the lion' praises Carton- 'the jackal's point of bringing forth his resemblance with Darnay. Stryver says that ever since they were in school together, Carton's life has always lacked a unified direction. As Carton complains about his life, Stryver changes the subject to Lucie. He praises her beauty but Carton calls her a 'golden-haired doll'.

Chapters 6 to 9

A period of four months has passed and the court proceedings have been forgotten. Dr Manette lives in a quaint house with his daughter Lucie. Lorry is now their family friend and is on his way to have dinner with the Manettes. Waiting for the Manettes to return, he engages in a conversation with Miss Pross. He is surprised to see Dr Manette's shoe making bench among his possessions. Miss Pross tells Lorry that hundreds of suitors approach Lucie but all of them are unworthy of 'Ladybird'. She continues that only her own brother Solomon Pross is a worthy suitor, but he has stolen all her possessions and forced her into poverty. Lucie and Manette are joined by Darnay upon their return. He narrates a strange story that puts a strange look on Manette's face. Meanwhile, Carton also joins them and suddenly the loud foot steps are heard making an alarming echo. Lucie believes that the people whose footsteps can be heard will gradually be a part of their lives.

The scene shifts to the royal court in Paris where Monseigneur is holding a reception. Indulged in sumptuosity, he is having four servants help him with his drinking chocolate. It is said that his money corrupts anyone who touches it. Among all the pomp and decadence, the party breaks up with a storm. Marquis Evremonde condemns Monesigneur's arrogance and leaves crazily racing his carriage through the city streets. The carriage suddenly hits something and stops. Marquis sees a tall man holding his dead baby that died under the wheels of the carriage. He blames the accident on the peasants and inquires whether his horses have been injured. Defarge comes out of his wine shop and comforts the baby's father, while Marquis throws a few coins over them and rides away. He reaches the small

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village of which he is the lord. He looks at the peasants living a wretched and exploited life in his chateau. He asks a road mender whom he had noticed during his journey what he was staring at. He replies that someone was holding the bottom of his carriage. He drives past indifferent to the woes of the peasants. Upon entering his chateau, he inquires whether Monsieur Charles has arrived from England, to which the servant replies that he hasn't.

Charles Darnay arrives later at night to meet his uncle Marquis and it becomes obvious by their conversation that they share a strained relationship. He detests the thinking of his uncle that being superior is their 'natural destiny'. He argues that his family's name is linked with fear and slavery all over France, but Marquis maintains that the class distinction is essential. Darnay announces that he wants to settle in England and renounce his uncle's property. However, the following morning Marquis is found dead, a knife having pierced his heart. A note attached to the knife reads 'Drive him fast to his tomb. This, from Jacques.'

Chapters 10 to 13

A year later, Darney has shifted to England and works in London as a dedicated French teacher and translator. He visits Dr Manette and reveals his love for his daughter. He says that he wishes to marry Lucie and his marriage will only help strengthen the bond between a daughter and a father. Manette admires his manner of seeking his daughter's hand but informs him that there are two more suitors—Stryver and Carton. Darnay confesses to Manette that he wants to share a secret regarding his real identity, but Manette asks him to wait till the wedding day. He takes his leave and Lucie returns. She is shocked to find her father working at his shoe maker's bench. Holding his hand she walks with him through the hall way for a long time. Later that night, working in his chamber with Carton, Stryver announces that he wants to marry Lucie. Carton is upset with his words but assures Stryver that he is not at all disturbed, yet he drinks heavily. Stryver suggests him to find a wife who can take care of him.

Stryver plans to propose marriage to Lucie, and on his way he decides to stop at Tellson's bank and reveal his intentions to Lorry. Lorry advises him to wait till he finds out his position in Manettes' house. Stryver gets upset and calls Lucie a fool if she rejects his offer. However, he dismisses the plan and asks Lorry to forget what he had said. Sidney Carton visits Lucie's house and speaks to her. She notices his ill looks and asks him if it is not a pity to be wasting away the gift of life. He laments that it is too late and he shall never be able to lead a better life. Lucie gives him hope and he is moved by her compassion. He admits that he loves her but she is too good for him. He tells her that he can do anything for her; he can even give his life for her.

Chapters 14 to 16

Sitting outside the Teller's bank, Jerry Cruncher sees a funeral procession and learns from the crowd following it that it is the funeral of Roger Cly who was one

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of the witnesses in Charles Darnay's case. Jerry joins the procession in burying Cly. The mob gets violent after the burial and engages in looting and breaking windows. Jerry reaches home and again rants about his wife's prayers. He goes out late at night with a sack, a crowbar and a rope. His son secretly follows him to the graveyard where he digs up Cly's body to be sold to the scientists. Terrified, his son runs back home and the following morning asks his father what a 'resurrection man' is. Jerry replies that a resurrection man is an honest tradesman whose deals in 'person's bodies'. His son reveals his intention of being a resurrection man when he grows up. Meanwhile, in the wine shop at Paris, Defarge enters accompanying the road mender whom he calls 'Jacques'. He reveals that he had seen a man hanging beneath Marquis' carriage a year ago, and a few months later that man was imprisoned for Marquis's murder. One of the Jacques informs him that Defarge had presented a petition to the king to save that man's life as his baby had been killed by Marquis's carriage, but the petition was ignored and the man was hanged. He is asked to wait outside and Defarge and the other Jacques decide to register the names of the entire aristocracy to be executed. Madame Defarge is knitting a pattern that contains the names in codes, of those who are to be executed. Defarge and his wife take the road mender to see King Louis XVI and Queen Marie Antoinette as they pass by in their coach. The road mender is excited to see them and screams, 'Long live the king!'. Defarge is pleased at his excitement and says, 'You make these fools believe that it will last forever.'

In the evening Defarge is informed by 'Jacques of the police' that John Barsad, a spy has been sent to their quarters. Madame Defarge decides to register his name. They return to the wine shop and Defarge laments that he fears that he will not witness the revolution in his lifetime. Madame Defarge gives him hope by saying that the revolution is like lightning and earthquake that take time to form, but strike with a sudden force. Barsad comes to the wine shop pretending to be sharing their concerns, commenting upon the terrible plight of the peasants. However, Madame Defarge knits his name while speaking to him. Barsad informs them that Charles Darnay, Marquis's nephew is soon going to marry Lucie in England. Madame Defarge tells her husband that Darnay and his entire family are registered already.

Chapters 17 to 20

It is the eve of Lucie's wedding and she is sitting with her father assuring him that her wedding will not change their close bonding. For the first time Dr Manette talks to Lucie about his imprisonment in the Bastille. He tells her that he always thought of her and wondered what she would grow up to be. He says that he has known all happiness due to her. The next morning, before going to the church for the wedding, Darnay reveals his secret to Dr Manette who turns 'deadly pale' at this information. The wedding takes place and Manette says, 'Take her, Charles! She is yours!' they depart for their honeymoon and a sudden change comes over

Manette. Lorry visits him and is informed by Miss Pross that Dr Manette is making shoes. He doesn't recognize Lorry, and they decide to keep a watch on him for nine days.

On the tenth day, Dr Manette looks better as he has put away his shoe maker's bench and is busy reading. Mr Lorry decides to discuss his problem indirectly as Dr Manette does not remember the last nine days of his strange behavior. He talks to him of a certain Mr Smith and asks if his relapse is likely to recur. Dr Manette says that the worst is over as the trigger is very unlikely to resurface. Lorry suggests that they should destroy the shoemaker's bench, but Manette says that the tools probably comforted his trauma and so should not be taken away. However, he agrees to destroy it for Lucie's sake. Mr. Lorry and Miss Pross break and bury the tools when Dr Manette leaves to join his daughter and her husband. They return from their honeymoon and Sidney Carton visits them. He apologizes to Darnay for his rudeness in the past and seeks his friendship. Darnay thanks him for helping to have him acquitted. He leaves and Lucie implores her husband to be soft with Carton as he is a good-hearted man and she has witnessed his wounded heart. Darnay is moved with Lucie's compassion and promises her to be sympathetic towards Carton.

Chapters 21 to 24

Several years pass and Lucie seems to be enjoying her married life. She has a daughter named Lucie; she also has a son who dies young. Lucie sits in the corner hearing the echoes of distant footsteps. Lorry visits them and informs that Paris is experiencing a restless phase. He says that a large number of French citizens are sending their money to England. But he is relieved to find that everything is fine in the Manette household. The scene shifts to Paris where the peasants are led by the Defarges storming the Bastille. Inside the Bastille, they release the prisoners and Defarge threatens a guard and demands him to be taken to 'One Hundred and Five North Tower', a cell where Dr Manette had been captivated. Defarge searches the cell and finds the initials A.M on the wall. He rejoins the mob in murdering the governor and Madame Defarge cuts off his head.

After a week, as Madame Defarge, now named 'The Vengeance' is knitting as usual, Defarge enters with the news that Foulon has been captured. He is the one who had asked the peasants to eat grass if they were starving. He had also faked his death in order to escape the peasants' fury. However he is caught in the country and the peasants are led by 'The Vengeance' to serve him justice. Foulon is hanged and grass is stuffed in his mouth. The mob also captures Foulon's son-in- law and treats him in a similar manner. The countryside is left desolate and ruined. One of the Jacques meets the road mender and they greet each other as revolutionaries. The road mender directs him to the Marquis' chateau. He burns down the chateau at night, but Monsieur Gabelle, the local tax collector escapes on his horse and watches the chateau burn. Such incidents have become very common all over France.

Three years elapse as the political agitation continues in France. The subjugated aristocrats seek refuge in England and as a result the Tellson's bank in London turns into a 'gathering place of Monseigneur'. Mr Lorry is sent off to France by the Tellsons so as to assist their Paris branch during the period of turmoil. Although Darnay suggests him not to go but he decides to take Jerry Cruncher along as his bodyguard. Lorry receives a letter addressed to the Marquis St. Evremonde, but Darnay being the surviving Marquis takes the letter from Lorry not letting him suspect his true identity. The letter is from Gabelle who has been imprisoned. He pleads the only surviving Marquis to return to France and help him. Darnay decides to leave for France as he has never been an oppressor; he thinks that France is safe for him. Leaving all 'that was dear on earth behind him', Darnay begins his journey to France with a 'glorious vision of doing good.'

Book the Third: The Track of a Storm

Chapters 1 to 5

On his way to France, Darnay comes across many difficulties as he is interrogated by the revolutionaries in every small town that he passes by. He learns that a new decree will soon be passed declaring all the emigrants to be sentenced to death. Later, he is sentenced to be imprisoned in La Force by the revolutionaries. When he protests, he is told that he has no rights as he is an emigrant. It is decided that he should be taken to Paris 'In Secret' by an armed escort who is none other than Defarge. Darnay seeks his help but he refuses and says that his allegiance lies with his country. He is confined to isolation in a very small cell where he thinks 'he made shoes, he made shoes, he made shoes.' Meanwhile Lucie and Dr Manette reach the Tellson's bank in France and inform Mr Lorry of Darnay's confinement in La Force. A mob gathers in the courtyard and as the blood stained 'savages' sharpen their weapons on a grindstone, Lorry reveals that they are preparing to kill the prisoners. However, Dr Manette says that he can influence the mob as he has been a former prisoner in the Bastille. Soon, he is led to Paris by the mob crying 'Help for the Bastille prisoner's kindred in La Force.'

Mr. Lorry fears that harbouring the wife and daughter of a prisoner may compromise bank's business, so he finds another lodging for Lucie, her daughter and Miss Pross and directs Jerry Cruncher to guard them. Defarge brings Dr. Manette's message to Lorry that Charles is safe but he is unable to leave the place. Lorry takes Defarge to Lucie as per Manette's instructions. Defarge feels that Madam Defarge should accompany them so as to familiarize herself with their faces for their safety in future. They reach Lucie's lodging and give her the note from Darnay. Lucie begs Madam Defarge to be merciful to Darnay but she coldly replies that the course of revolution cannot be altered for one family. Dr. Manette returns from La Force after four days and informs Lucy that Charles has not been executed. He tells Lorry that he has used his influence with the tribunal in keeping

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Charles alive. Moreover, the court having rejected his plea to free Charles, has appointed him the inspecting physician of La Force and two more prisons. Lucie is happy with this arrangement as her father can see Darnay regularly and ensure his safety. Guillotine is introduced and is made a fixture in the streets of Paris as the king and queen are beheaded by the revolutionaries. 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, or Death' becomes the banner of the new republic; as a result beheadings increase rampantly and the time goes by. A year and three months have passed since Darnay's confinement.

Dr. Manette takes his daughter to a place from where the window of the prison is visible, so that she can see her husband sometimes. As he is famous as the 'Bastille Captive', no one doubts him. It becomes a daily feature for Lucie to stand near the window every day and Darnay also looks through it. The former road mender is now a wood sawyer and he talks to Lucie while she awaits her husband's glimpse. His saw is inscribed with 'Little Sainte Guillotine' and he too pretends that his saw is a guillotine that beheads the prisoners which are actually the small wooden pieces. Madam Defarge happens to pass by following the violent dance known as Carmagnole. Manette informs his daughter that the trial for her husband has been scheduled for the next day.

Chapters 6 to 10

The trial of Charles Darnay is held in the court of the new republic where a blood thirsty mob awaits the judgment. However, Charles announces that he is the son-in- law of Dr Manette and he has returned to France only to save someone's life. His status as much loved Manette's son-in-law strengthens his case and the testimonies from Manette and Gabelle convince the jury to acquit him. The mob, once furious, now carries him home on their shoulders. Darnay admits that Dr Manette has done what no one else could have done for him. Lucie is overjoyed to have him back home but she remains frightened for Charles. She hears strange footsteps on the stairs and suddenly the soldiers appear at her door. They demand Darnay's arrest. Dr Manette protests but the soldiers inform him that he must make a sacrifice that the new republic demands of him. Manette inquires who has demanded Charles's re-arrest and the soldiers name Defarge and Madam Defarge. They do not reveal the third name and say that they will know it by the next day.

Miss Pross has gone shopping with Jerry Cruncher and she suddenly finds herself standing in front of her lost brother Solomon. Solomon tells her that he is working as a spy so she should not make his discovery public. However, Cruncher also recognizes Solomon and suddenly Sidney Carton appears and informs that Solomon's name was Barsad when he was in England. Carton threatens Solomon that he will reveal his true identity if he refuses to accompany him to the Tellson's bank. At the bank, Carton informs Lorry that Charles has been re-arrested. Carton says that he has a plan to save Charles but he needs Barsad's cooperation. He

says that he has seen Barsad secretly conversing with an English spy named Roger Cly. Barsad says that Cly is dead but Jerry Cruncher says that his death was faked as his coffin only contained stones. Barsad admits that Cruncher's statement is true. He says that although he can easily access the prison in which Darnay is kept, but it is impossible to arrange his escape. Carton convinces him to help him execute his secret plan.

Barsad leaves and Carton reveals to Lorry and Cruncher that he has arranged a visit to Darnay in prison before his execution. At night, Carton goes to a chemist and purchases two 'packets', and the chemist warns him to be careful. As he wanders through the streets, he is reminded of the words of a priest 'I am the resurrection and the life…'. Carton keeps repeating these words and then helps a little girl cross the street. The priest's words still echo in his mind and he keeps wandering through the night. Darnay's trial begins in the morning and the names of Darnay's accusers are announced by the judge. He names Ernest Defarge, Therese Defarge and Dr. Manette as the ones who have denounced Darnay. Manette is shocked to hear his name but Defarge shows him a paper that he had found in Manette's cell in Bastille.

Manette's letter is read out aloud which carries the story of Manette's imprisonment. It was in 1757 that the two brothers Marquis St.Evremonde and Marquis, took Dr. Manette to treat a dying young peasant woman and her dying brother who revealed that Marquis had abused his sister and killed her husband. Both of them died, and the next day Marquis's wife came to Manette's house and told him that she wished to make atonement for the sins of her family for the sake of her son Charles. She said that she wanted to help the dead woman's sister, but Manette told her that he was ignorant of her whereabouts. However, later at night, he was arrested by Marquis's man in the presence of Ernest Defarge, his faithful servant. The letter ended with Manette's condemnation of the Evremonde family and "their descendants to the last of their race." The jury sentences Darnay to "Death within four and twenty hours".

Chapters 11 to 15

Lucie implores the mob to let her embrace her husband one last time. Barsad, who has to escort Darnay to prison, allows Lucie and her husband to say their goodbye. Darnay urges that Dr Manette should not blame himself for his arrest. Lucie faints and Sydney Carton carries her to her apartment. On seeing Carton, little Lucie exclaims that he can save her father. Dr Manette leaves to again try his influence in an attempt to save Darnay. However, Lorry and Carton agree that there is no hope. Carton arrives at Defarge's wine shop and the Defarges wonder at his stark resemblance with Darnay. Carton overhears the conversation between Defarge and his wife that she wants to denounce Dr Manette, Lucie as well as the little Lucie. Defarge thinks it unnecessary but Madam Defarge reminds him of the

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atrocities of the evremondes on her own family. Carton leaves to return to Lorry. Later, Manette returns home madly searching for his shoe making tools. Carton tries to calm him and takes out some papers from his pocket. He hands the documents that ensure Lucie's, her daughter's and the doctor's escape from the city. He also gives him his own document and tells him of Madam Defarge's plan to exterminate the entire Manette family. He warns Lorry that Madam Defarge may recall those documents soon, so he directs him to secure a coach for the next day, and wait for him before leaving. He says a final goodbye and blesses Lucie.

'From the farmer of seventy… to the seamstress of twenty', there are fifty two prisoners who have been denounced to meet their fate at the guillotine. Darnay has surrendered himself to his fate and is ready to meet the death bravely. Waiting for his impending execution the following day, he falls asleep. Sometime later, Sidney Carton reaches his cell and drugs him with the contents of the 'packets' he had bought from the chemist. As Darnay faints, he switches clothes with him and with Barsad's assistance, succeeds in carrying Darnay to the carriage at the Tellson's. At the scheduled time, the guards take Sydney Carton believing him to be Charles Darnay, to a dark room where he stands in the queue of the denounced prisoners, soon to be beheaded. The young Seamstress realizes that he is not Charles and asks him if he is dying for Charles's sake, and he replies that he is also dying for Charles's wife and daughter. On the other end, Lorry and Dr Manette along with Lucie, her daughter and Charles disguised as Sydney Carton, having produced the documents at the city gates, flee to England.

As Carton awaits his death, Madam Defarge leaves for Lucie's apartment so as to condemn her along with her father and daughter. She realizes that the entire family has already escaped and inquires Lucie's whereabouts from Miss Pross. In the fight that ensues between Madam Defarge and Miss Pross, Madam defarge gets shot by her own gun. Meanwhile, at the guillotine, Carton repeats his words 'I am the resurrection' as the seamstress calmly embraces her death. Carton imagines a peaceful future and sees that he will be fondly remembered by Lucie and her family. He has a calm and prophetic look at his face as he is aware that his sacrifice is 'a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known'.

Check Your Progress

1. What is the significance of the broken cask of red wine?
2. What is the significance of the golden strands to Dr Manette?
3. Comment upon the constant knitting of Madam Defarge.

14.3 CHARACTER SKETCHES AND THEMES

Some of the important character sketches and themes of the novel are mentioned in this section.

Lucie Manette

Lucie Manette is the beautiful daughter of Dr Manette who had been imprisoned in Bastille for many years. Lucie is the embodiment of love, compassion and virtue. She restores her long lost father to life with her care and devotion. She marries Charles whose past leads to his condemnation, but throughout his trials Lucie remains by her husband's side and makes all possible efforts for his release. Her compassion for Sydney Carton is evident from her request to her husband to treat him with utmost generosity as she has seen his wounded heart. It is the outcome of Lucie's compassion that Carton blesses her and declares that he will do anything for her and her dear ones. She presents a stark contrast to the ruthless character of Madam Defarge.

Charles Darnay

Charles St. Evremonde is the son of Marquis St. Evremonde who is against the oppressive ways of his aristocratic family. He renounces his inheritance and property in France and leads a simple life in England as a French teacher. His first encounter with Lucie establishes him as a kind hearted young man who helps her in taking her father on board. Before he marries Lucie, he wishes to reveal his true identity but Dr Manette stops him until his wedding. He gets into trouble as he wishes to help his fellow citizen and is imprisoned in La Force. He is sentenced to death and he surrenders himself to his destiny. However, Sydney Carton saves his life by exchanging place with him.

Sydney Carton

Sydney Carton is introduced as an aimless drunkard who assists Mr Stryver in his court proceedings. He admits to be leading a wasteful life. He confesses his love to Lucie and is touched by her compassion. He declares that he will do anything for her if she ever needs him. True to his word, he emerges as a selfless martyr in sacrificing his life to save Lucie's husband. His act provides a real meaning to his life in his own eyes and he envisions a beautiful Paris, a peaceful life foe Lucie and her loved ones and above all his own special place in the hearts of his loved ones.

Theme

A Tale of Two Cities not only asserts Dickens belief in resurrection, but also the redemption through sacrifice. In the first book, Dr Manette is 'recalled to life' by his daughter and Mr Lorry who actually dreams of digging up Dr Manette's body.

He is restored to life by the love and compassion of his daughter, and his own act of forgiving Charles Darnay for his father's sins leads to his redemption. Later, he is transformed into a hero who leads the mob shouting the slogans for the release of his son- in- law. In the second book, Jerry Cruncher appears as 'the resurrection man' who steals the dead bodies from their graves and sells them to the medical schools.

Charles Darnay is released the first time due to his resemblance to Sydney Carton and the second time due to Sydney Carton himself who keeps repeating 'I am the resurrection'. In the third book, Sydney Carton sacrifices his life in order to secure a peaceful life for Lucie and her dear ones, as he had once promised. Not only does his own life find a new meaning that he has sought throughout his life, but he also envisions himself as a loved one in the hearts of his own loved ones.

Important Passages for Explanation

1. 'It was the best of times …………………… direct the other way'.

   Reference to Context

   These are the opening lines of *A tale of Two Cities* pointing out the inherent motifs of the novel.

   Explanation

   Dickens begins the novel with a slight indication of the tensed state that prevails throughout the novel. There is a constant conflict between the love of the family and class oppression, between the good intent and the evil doings, between the wisdom and light and folly and darkness.

2. 'But he has been …………………………… duty, rest, comfort'.

   Reference to Context

   The above lines are spoken by Mr Lorry to Miss Lucie in the first book of the novel. Lorry meets Lucie to inform her about the whereabouts of her long lost father whom she thinks to be dead.

   Explanation

   Mr Lorry tells Lucie that her father has been found. As he has not seen him himself, he says that probably her father would have undergone a great change over all these years and may be in a deplorable condition because of all the hardships that he had to endure. However, he hopes for the best as he is still alive contrary to her belief. He says that he will accompany her to Paris where her father has been taken to the house of an old servant. He will try to identify him and he urges her to restore him to life with her love and compassion.

3. 'None. My mind is a blank ….............………….. no remembrance of the process'.

Reference to Context

The above lines are spoken by Dr Manette to the judge in the second book of the novel. As Charles Darnay is convicted of the treason, Dr Manette is produced in the court as a witness against him. The judge inquires him about his remembrance to the occasion which he denies.

Explanation

Dr Manette says that he has no memory of the time when he was in captivity at the Bastille. He says that his mind is blank for the time period that he was in prison making shoes till he was restored to life by his dear daughter. He does not even remember what made her recognize her daughter.

4. 'It is extraordinary to me ……………...............……………….. See! Give him that'.

Reference to Context

The above lines are spoken by Monsieur the Marquis to the father of the dead child whom he crushed under the wheels of his carriage.

Explanation

Monsieur the Marquis says that he is surprised at the carelessness of the peasants who cannot take care of themselves and their children who are always on the road leading to their death by accident. Indifferent to the child's death, he is concerned whether his horses are injured. He throws a gold coin at the father of the dead child and asks him to pick it up.

5. 'Better to be a rational ……………………........……………… I renounce them'.

Reference to Context

The above lines are a part of the conversation between Monsieur the Marquis and his nephew Charles Darnay in the second book of the novel.

Explanation

Monsieur the Marquis tells his nephew that he should take pride in his 'natural destiny' which is to be that of an oppressor. But he can sense the differences in their opinions and thus considers him lost. However, Charles says that he is not lost but he wishes to lose his inheritance as well as France. He declares that he renounces all his property.

6. 'For you and for any dear ……..............……………….. for those dear to you'.

Reference to Context

The above lines are spoken by Sidney Carton to Miss Lucie Manette as he

confesses his love for her in the second book of the novel.

Explanation

Sidney Carton tells Lucie that if there will ever be the need, he will not hesitate to do anything for Lucie or her loved ones. He assures her that he will happily make any sacrifice for her and her loved ones in the hour of need. His intentions are true as he is the one who emerges as a true martyr in sacrificing his life for Lucie's husband.

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7. 'Lucie I recall these old ……………………....................…….. we have before us'.

Reference to Context

The above lines are spoken by Dr. Manette to his daughter Lucie on her wedding eve in the second book of the novel.

Explanation

Dr. Manette says that he remembers the old days that he spent in prison only thinking about his daughter and that is his reason for loving her more than he can ever express. He is grateful to God for uniting him to his daughter who is the only source of his happiness. He admits that he has never known the happiness that he has known in the short span of time in the company of his sweet child.

8. 'I would ask you dearest ………………................………… Have seen it bleeding'.

Reference to Context

The above lines are spoken by Lucie to her husband Charles Darnay in the second book of the novel. As Sydney Carton visits them, she realizes that her husband is not as considerate to him as she expects him to be.

Explanation

Lucie implores her husband to be very generous and compassionate with Sydney Carton and try to ignore his faults if he finds any. She says that he has a heart that is badly wounded although he rarely reveals his wounded heart to anyone. She admits to have been exposed to his wounded heart.

9. 'I entreat you to observe ………………..............……………. Not that my right?'

Reference to Context

The above lines are spoken by Charles Darnay in his defense as he is presented in the court of the new republic in the third book of the novel.

Explanation

Charles Darnay says in his defense that he has voluntarily come to France in order to provide protection to the person who had sought his help in a

letter. He has produced the letter in the court as evidence to his statement. He seeks the opportunity to help his fellow citizen as his right.

'Are you dying for him …………………………….. brave hand, stranger'.

Reference to Context

The above lines are a part of the conversation between the seamstress and Sydney Carton disguised as Charles Darnay in the third book of the novel.

Explanation

The seamstress realizes that Sidney Carton is disguised as Charles Darnay, so she asks in surprise whether he is embracing death for Charles' sake. Sidney Carton replies that he is not dying only for Charles but also for Charles's wife and daughter. Impressed by his boldness and bravery, she urges to hold his hand as she also awaits death.

Check Your Progress

4. What does Jerry Cruncher tell his son about the resurrection man?
5. What does Manette's letter reveal?
6. How does Monsieur Marquis react to the death of a child?
7. Who was disguised as Charles Darney?
8. What does Charles Darnay say in his defense?

14.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. The broken cask of red wine symbolizes the desperate hunger of the oppressed peasants. The peasants' hunger is literal as they starve in their poverty, as well as metaphorical as they desperately await their political freedom.
2. The golden strands of Dr Manette's daughter Lucie help him revive his memory. He notices her golden hair and shows the similar strands of hair tied in a rag that he wears around his neck. He remembers having begged to be allowed to keep these golden strands of his wife upon his imprisonment.
3. Literally, Madam Defarge's knitting comprises of an entire network of symbols as she registers the list of names of the ones condemned to die in the name of the new republic. Her constant knitting represents her cold bloodedness and vengefulness in sentencing the victims to death.

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4. As Jerry Cruncher's son inquires from his father about a resurrection man, he replies that a resurrection man is an honest tradesman who deals in 'person's bodies'.
5. Manette's letter reveals the story of Manette's imprisonment. It was in 1757 that the two brothers Marquis St.Evremonde and Marquis, took Dr. Manette to treat a dying young peasant woman and her dying brother who revealed that Marquis had abused his sister and killed her husband. Both of them died, and the next day Marquis's wife came to Manette's house to tell him that she wished to make atonement for the sins of her family for the sake of her son Charles.
6. Monsieur Marquis is indifferent and cold to the death of a child and says that he is surprised at the carelessness of the peasants who cannot take care of themselves and their children who are always on the road leading to their death by accident. He is rather concerned whether his horses are injured. He throws a gold coin at the father of the dead child and asks him to pick it up.
7. The seamstress realizes that Sidney Carton is disguised as Charles Darnay, so she asks in surprise whether he is embracing death for Charles' sake.
8. Charles Darnay says in his defense that he has voluntarily come to France in order to provide protection to the person who had sought his help in a letter. He produced the letter in the court as evidence to his statement. He seeks the opportunity to help his fellow citizen as his right.

14.5 SUMMARY

- In the year 1775, when France seems to be on the threshold of witnessing a revolution, indulged in extreme violence, England appears to be 'scarcely better'; as Dickens puts in *A Tale of Two Cities*, 'It was the best of times, it was the worst of times'. In the month of November, on a Friday night a mail coach is heading from London to Dover.
- Jarvis Lorry dreams of a conversation with a ghost. Lorry tells him that he has been 'recalled to life' and inquires whether he wants to live. He asks him in a mysterious manner if he should show 'her' to him. The ghost gives different reactions to him. He weeps and implores him to let him see her soon, and also says that he would die if he were to see her soon.
- The setting of the novel shifts to Saint Antoine, a Paris suburb. The place appears to be cold and gloomy. A cask of red wine falls on the street and breaks. Everyone including the idlers and businessmen rush to it and drink the spilled wine.
- Dr Manette is a frail old man indifferent to the outside world. He reveals in

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his faint voice that he is making shoes of the latest fashion for a lady. He says his name is 'One Hundred and Five, North Tower'. As Lucie goes near him, he notices her golden hair and shows the similar strands of hair tied in a rag that he wears around his neck.

- The scene shifts to Tellson's bank in London in 1780. The old and reputed bank takes pride in its ugliness, darkness and smallness. The bank is located near the Temple Bar, a place where the criminals' executed heads were displayed till recent, since the death penalty was greatly used for even for the crimes like forgery and petty theft.
- The jury is informed by the Attorney General that Darnay has been passing English secrets to France for five years. John Barsad's testimony supports the Attorney General's case but cross examination reveals that Barsad has himself been in debtor's prison and involved in brawls over gambling. The defense attorney Mr Stryver proves that the second witness Roger Cly is also untrustworthy. The similar questions are asked to Lorry and Lucie.
- A period of four months passes by and the court proceedings have been forgotten. Dr Manette lives in a quaint house with his daughter Lucie. Lorry is now their family friend and is on his way to have dinner with the Manettes. Waiting for the Manettes to return, he engages in a conversation with Miss Pross.
- In Paris, Monseigneur's carriage suddenly hits something and stops. Marquis sees a tall man holding his dead baby that died under the wheels of the carriage. He blames the accident on the peasants and inquires whether his horses have been injured.
- Lucie is shocked to find her father working at his shoe maker's bench. Holding his hand she walks with him through the hall way for a long time. Later that night, working in his chamber with Carton, Stryver announces that he wants to marry Lucie.
- Madame Defarge is knitting a pattern that contains the names in codes, of those who are to be executed. Defarge and his wife take the road mender to see King Louis XVI and Queen Marie Antoinette as they pass by in their coach. The road mender is excited to see them and screams, 'Long live the king!'. Defarge is pleased at his excitement and says, 'You make these fools believe that it will last forever.'
- On the tenth day, Dr Manette looks better as he has put away his shoe maker's bench and is busy reading. Mr Lorry decides to discuss his problem indirectly as Dr Manette does not remember the last nine days of his strange behavior. He talks to him of a certain Mr Smith and asks if his relapse is likely to recur.
- After a week, as Madame Defarge, now named 'The Vengeance' is knitting

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as usual, Defarge enters with the news that Foulon has been captured. He is the one who had asked the peasants to eat grass if they were starving. He had also faked his death in order to escape the peasants' fury. However he is caught in the country and the peasants are led by 'The Vengeance' to serve him justice. Foulon is hanged and grass is stuffed in his mouth.

- On his way to France, Darnay comes across many difficulties as he is interrogated by the revolutionaries in every small town that he passes by. He learns that a new decree will soon be passed declaring all the emigrants to be sentenced to death. Later, he is sentenced to be imprisoned in La Force by the revolutionaries. When he protests, he is told that he has no rights as he is an emigrant. It is decided that he should be taken to Paris 'In Secret' by an armed escort who is none other than Defarge.

14.6 KEY WORDS

- **French Revolution:** The period between 1789 and 1799 marked by the social as well as political unrest in France is termed as the French Revolution. As the French Government experienced a fiscal crisis in the 1780s, the weak leadership of King Louis XVI mishandled the affairs.
- **Guillotine:** It is an apparatus designed for efficiently carrying out executions by beheading. The device is best known for its use in France, in particular during the French Revolution.'

14.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on the setting of the novel *A Tale of Two Cities*.
2. Briefly mention the character of Lucie Manette.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Discuss the major themes in the novel.
2. Examine the plot construction of the novel.
3. '*A Tale of Two Cities* not only asserts Dickens belief in resurrection, but also the redemption through sacrifice.' Explain the statement.

14.8 FURTHER READINGS

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